THE RURAL SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY INTERFACE IN NEW

YORK STATE:

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RURAL VISIONING PROJECT

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

by

Heather Kristine Strachan

January 2011

ABSTRACT

The Rural Visioning Project evolved as a collaborative effort between Cornell's Community & Rural Development Institute, the Department of Development Sociology's *Rural New York Initiative*, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, with the goal of collecting stakeholder input to generate a comprehensive vision and working blueprint for the future of rural New York. Using data obtained from nine regional Listening Sessions held throughout rural New York as part of this initiative, as well as from an associated Youth Engagement survey and workshop, this paper examines the implications for the state's rural schools and youth.

Qualitative data collected through the Listening Sessions suggests that, although residents of rural New York recognize that healthy, vibrant, and sustainable communities require active citizens of all ages, they identify a general trend towards the emotional and physical alienation of youth. As described by participants, youth alienation from, and lack of engagement in, the institutions of both school and community manifest themselves through high school dropout rates, out-migration, and "brain drain" of talented youth from the local area.

At the same time, contrary to the perception that youth are unaware or disinterested in their communities, and lacking a sense of community pride, comments from both the 4-H workshop and the web survey suggest that youth are highly in tune with what they see happening in their communities—both positive and negative—and eager for a chance to speak on these issues.

Given that education emerged as the issue most frequently identified as either "extremely" or "very" important in both the adult (93%) and youth (80%) web-based Rural Visioning Survey, it is clear that education is highly valued by residents of rural New York. Current critiques of the rural educational system brought forth in the Rural Visioning Project, however, suggest a debilitating mismatch between educational policy, which seems to focus on preparing students to succeed on strictly quantifiable outcomes of standardized testing, and the needs of rural youth and communities, who desire a focus on what they see as the more practical applications of education—those that will enable students to lead productive and fulfilling lives in communities Within this realm, the integration of school and community emerged as the common ground between adult and youth responses.

Examining a body of qualitative and quantitative data, including indices of student motivation and standardized test scores, in light of the data from New York State, this paper establishes a rationale for the implementation of programs which integrate youth, school, and community, through five policy recommendations:

1. Listen to what residents, of all ages, have to say about education and school reform in program design.
2. Encourage active and hands-on learning that allows students to make connections between the various subjects and real-world applications.
3. Allow for flexible curriculum that enables schools and communities to work together to make use of their strengths.

4. Increase focus on programs based upon the connection between economic development and education, linking school improvement and community economic development to the benefit of both.

5. Implement programs and curriculum that actively engage youth in the community planning and development process.

Despite the popularly acknowledged tension between locally identified needs and standardized state control, it was found that all of these recommendations offer effective means of bridging the gap between youth, schools, and communities with the overall goal of reducing alienation by creating active roles for youth and community ownership in education.

A review of research suggests that the implementation of these educational strategies indeed complements/enhances student achievement as measured by various institutionalized state and national standards, allowing for the conclusion that it is, indeed, possible to simultaneously combat student disengagement and achieve state standards. A mixture of qualitative and quantitative data demonstrates positive impacts on student motivation and achievement, and, in some cases, suggests community-level benefits as well. With this in mind, there appears to be a need for increased mobilization of studies on the effectiveness of such differentiated educational programs and dialogue about how to implement more of the ones demonstrated as valuable in rural schools.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Heather Strachan obtained her B.S in Natural Resources, cum laude, from Cornell University in May, 2004. Upon graduation, she remained at Cornell to pursue a post-graduate degree in Learning, Teaching, and Social Policy, with a specific interest in rural schools and communities.

Born and raised in a rapidly suburbanizing area of New Jersey, Heather grew up enjoying defying the myriad of stereotypes often associated with the Garden State, and is not embarrassed to admit that she spent a great deal of her childhood in a futile attempt to convince her parents to move to rural New York. Frequent family vacations throughout rural New York, traipsing around the family farm in Western New York, and listening to her mother's stories of growing up in that area captured her attention from a young age, and greatly influenced her educational goals and direction.

At Cornell, Heather was involved with various organizations that promote the viability of rural New York, including the Small Farms Program, New York State 4-H Youth Development, and the Community & Rural Development Institute. She is proud to have played a lead role in helping to design, coordinate, and teach the inaugural *Exploring the Small Farms Dream* course in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Her educational and research interest in rural New York was further developed in a research paper presented to the 2006 annual meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, entitled *Analysis of Wal-Mart's Short- and Long-Term Community Development Impacts in Rural New York State* (co-authored with Professor Paul Eberts).

Having lived everywhere from suburban New Jersey to a coastal island in Maine, a hilltop farm in Vermont to the plains of Colorado, New York's rural communities remain her first true "home" – the place she will always feel connected to.

For my mother--

because there is no such place as "upstate" New York

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express sincere thanks to my advisor Professor John Sipple, whose passion for New York's rural schools is contagious. From the moment I first walked into his office to discuss a potential project designed around rural schools, having never in my life even spoken to anyone with a similar interest, let alone heard of the Rural Schools Association, it has been an energizing experience. I will forever be grateful that, no matter many months (or years!) may have passed between my emails and drafts, he always took time out from his hectic schedule to review my work and offer his valuable comments and unique perspective.

I am also deeply indebted to Professor Emeritus Paul Eberts for sharing his wealth of knowledge about…well, literally, everything. How one person could manage so much research and store so many facts about rural New York, I will never know—but I do know that I could always count on a chat with Professor Eberts to challenge my preconceived notions and remind me that, as he is fond of saying, "If we would first know where we are and whither we are tending, then we could better tell where we want to go and how to get there."

For all their hard work on the Rural Visioning Project, Dr. Rod Howe, Ms. Robin Blakely, and everyone else associated with this initiative, deserve special acknowledgement. The depth with which they believed in the goals of this project truly gave it life. From my perspective, attending the Listening Sessions never felt like "work"—largely because of the positive energy and attitude they brought to this project.

Thanks to Ms. Joanne Baldini, of the New York State 4-H Office, who was instrumental in helping to coordinate the Youth Engagement aspect of the Rural Visioning Project, and, even more, in introducing me to the ideas of positive youth development and Youth Community Action. Through her, I have come to believe that youth do indeed have the power to transform their communities.

It would be impossible for me to list all of the professors at Cornell who have left a lasting impression on me: a few that deserve mention here include Professors Scott Peters, Ginny Steele, and David Brown.

Professor Tom Lyson, whose classes I always unsuccessfully attempted to plan my course schedule around, will remain an inspiration to me and everyone else who cares about rural communities in New York State and elsewhere.

Finally, this report would not have been possible without the participation of hundreds of rural New Yorkers in the Rural Visioning Project. My sincere thanks to everyone who drove through the snow and rain to attend a Listening Session and share their vision for the future of rural New York!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 A Vision for the Future of Rural New York

Participants in the nine regional Listening Sessions held throughout upstate New York as part of the Rural Visioning Project (RVP) were challenged to come together to develop a comprehensive vision that would serve as a "working blueprint" for the future of rural New York (Rural New York Initiative, 2006).

This vision, as articulated by participants in the Listening Sessions, suggested that a sustainable future for the state of rural New York demands the creation of vibrant communities, which will work together in strong networks to achieve success, while at the same time each taking pride in their own local knowledge and resources. These communities will contain a mixture of engaged citizens—from youth to seniors—all of whom have access to affordable and high-quality programs, services, and infrastructure. These successful rural communities will be based on a foundation of solid citizen support for, and participation in, a range of formal and informal social networks and local institutions, including schools, governments, and community organizations. At the heart of this vision for a sustainable future remains the goal that rural communities will offer positive natural, social, and economic environments in which to live and work. Participants emphasize that a combination of these factors will make these rural communities a place that all community members, including youth, will be proud to call "home."

The multigenerational emphasis central to the vision articulated by New York State residents makes it clear that, if this desired future for these rural communities is to be achieved, then youth cannot be overlooked. In fact, the education and engagement of young community members forms an implicit cornerstone of this vision, as set forth by Listening Session participants. Youth, up to and including ages all the way through young professionals, are an integral part of creating sustainable rural communities in accordance with this vision articulated by New York State residents.

Given the vision thus set forth, the next question is how to get from where we are now to where we want to be in the future—how to make this vision a reality.

1.2 Problem Identification

But where are we now? What do the residents of rural communities in New York State who participated in the Rural Visioning Project currently see going on in their rural communities today? Participants in the Listening Sessions recognize that healthy, vibrant, and sustainable communities require active citizens both young and old. In general, however, these residents perceive what they interpret as a general trend towards the emotional and physical alienation of youth. In these rural areas, youth alienation from, and lack of engagement in, the institutions of both school and community manifest themselves through high school dropout rates, out-migration, and "brain drain" of talented youth from local areas. At the root of these phenomena–whether real or perceived—Listening Session participants

identify a general lack of understanding of, and attention to, unique rural needs and opportunities.

Current critiques of the rural educational system brought out in the Rural Visioning Project suggest, as we will see in subsequent chapters, a debilitating mismatch between educational policy and the needs of rural youth and communities. Rural youth lack opportunities to develop integral skills needed for life, the workforce, and college. The current national emphasis on testing under the No Child Left Behind and/or Race to the Top initiatives and even New York State's own Regents program is seen as alienating and ineffective on both individual and community levels. Widespread concern suggests that the rigid focus on tests comes at the expense of vocational and BOCES programs, as well as other forms of differentiated instruction, which are critical for real-life workforce development. By devaluing career and technical education and vocational training, schools do not train or teach skills that will enable youth to obtain adequate, living-wage employment in their communities. Under this mismatched system, both youth development and workforce development suffer as students train to be "exported" from the community.

The disjuncture apparent within the school system also manifests itself, again as we will see in subsequent chapters, on a broader level in terms of a general lack of community engagement and investment. Youth in rural areas frequently are deprived of the opportunity to participate in activities which contribute to their own development and to the active development of their community. As a result, young people mature without ever becoming integrated into community activities or developing actions reflective of community pride and ownership—the lack of which causes

both youth and community development to stagnate. Such products of alienation and isolation ultimately express themselves in the form of physical migration away from the local area. In other words, education lacks a community focus and purpose, which results in a perceived lack of opportunity and creates a widespread sense of hopelessness among both younger and older generations within rural communities.

Further contributing to these problems, the relatively limited resources available in many rural areas may not currently being put to optimal use in benefiting students or communities. Although the current system is mismatched to rural needs, rural schools and youth services are often highly fragmented and inefficient, which only serve to further hinder youth and community development processes. Lack of stability, coordination, and resource-sharing contributes to the inability of rural schools and youth services to perform competitively and meet community needs.

For residents of these rural areas, the effects of this alienation and lack of opportunity manifest themselves in the form of youth out-migration and "brain drain," as youth leave the community and the overall community structure appears to age. Within the community, rural citizens see young people leaving the community and not coming back, and interpret this as the result of, not only a lack of gainful employment opportunities within the community, but, also as the result of deficiencies in youth-community relations and the fact that youth are not nurtured as valued community members at an early age. Thus, concerns associated with rural schools and youth translate into negative community-level impacts and contribute to the overall perception that rural areas lack positive opportunity.

Based on these issues set forth by the residents of rural New York State who participated in the Rural Visioning Project, it appears that the current challenge presented by rural schools and youth is three-pronged:

1. Lack of youth engagement in itself;
2. Lack of adult engagement with youth; and
3. Lack of policymakers engagement with both community adults and youth.

At the root of all of these problems has been a lack of dialogue among these groups that results in the associated disconnect between youth needs, rural community needs, and policy frameworks.

1.3 Context of Previous Research

In recent years, a number of studies have demonstrated the importance of monitoring and responding to youth demographic and community trends. In the drive for programs and policies that recognize and respect the unique strengths and needs of rural areas, sheer numbers provide rural policy some amount of leverage in New York State. As Beeson and Strange (2000) point out, more rural Americans live in New York State than in Idaho, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming—states typically perceived as "rural"—*combined.* In fact, the 3.4 million people living in NY's 44 rural counties is greater than that of 24 states' (Beeson & Strange, 2000).

Despite these sheer numbers, according to a recent report by the Public Policy Institute (2004) that cites data from the 2000 Census, population growth in upstate New York during the 1990s was smaller than

that of every other state except North Dakota and West Virginia—two states typically noted for their extremely rural nature. In the "crucial" 20-to-34-year old age group—the age group at which young people complete school, begin careers, start families, buy first homes, and, in general, put down roots in a community—upstate New York's population decreased by more than 22.4 percent between 1990 and 2000 (Public Policy Institute [PPI], 2004, p.8). As this report points out, although drops in this age cohort were experienced on a national level, the losses experienced by the upstate region of New York were more than *four* times the national drop of only 5.4 percent. Although these numbers can certainly not be interpreted as evidence that these 370,000 young people literally packed up and moved out of the region during the 1990s, it nonetheless underscores an important and debilitating trend– a disproportionately high loss of young people in this area of rural New York as compared to the rest of the nation.

These demographic trends have received statewide—and even national—attention. In a separate article in the *New York Times*, Roberts (2006) chronicles the plight of rural New York, describing an "accelerating exodus of young adults" from the region (para. 1). Based on census data from 1990-2004, the number of 25-to-34-year-olds in the 52 counties north of Rockland and Putnam declined by over 25 percent. This decline was greatest in the Southern Tier's Tioga County, where 42 percent fewer young adults of this age range were counted by the census in 2004 than in 1990. In addition, this *New York Times* article asserts that, based on the conclusions of two separate demographers who analyzed census data, in virtually all upstate counties, rates of out-migration were highest among college graduates—producing a veritable "brain drain" (para. 9). Robert G. Wilmers, chairman

6

of M&T Bank in Buffalo, which operates branches throughout western and central New York, is quoted telling shareholders that "The magnitude and duration of population loss among the youth is unprecedented in our history" (as cited in Roberts 2006, para.3).

Academic literature further suggests an overall decline in the number of young people in New York's 44 rural counties since 1980, as well as redistribution in their locations between 1990 and 2000. Recent analysis of population demographics in rural New York, presented by Eberts and Dixon (2006) suggests that out-migration is indeed occurring among a certain demographic, namely older teens and young adults. Data demonstrate a decline in the numbers of older teens age 15-19 and young adults age 20-24 and 25-29 in Less Dense Rural Towns in both 1990 and 2000, with a corresponding increase in the same age groups in Central Places (Eberts & Merschrod, 2004; Eberts & Dixon, 2006). It appears that Central Places thus tend to disproportionately attract older teens and young adults once they are independent enough to migrate on their own, while more rural areas tend to "export" them (Eberts & Dixon, 2006, p.6). This overall relocation can perhaps, therefore, be thought of as both a pull and a push.

At the same time, however, Eberts and Dixon (2006) hypothesize that some college-bound teens, reflected in the statistics above, will return to these rural and suburban town types once they have income and have started a family. According to their analysis, part of the current dearth of young people in these communities stems from the fact that it seems to be taking longer for this group to return to their communities. With this in mind, in 1990 the "return" age peaked by age 25, while in 2000 this peak age had increased to 45 (Eberts & Dixon 2006). In fact, most towns in upstate New

York actually grew in population size while concurrently aging, a trend which Eberts and Dixon surmise is due to both longer life span and this increased number of middle-aged adults migrating into these counties. Eberts (2007) classifies this as, in effect, a "brain surplus" of middle age adults in rural communities, in contrast with the popularly referenced youth "brain drain" (p. 8). Other studies, however, have attributed as much as 30% of these upstate population increases to prison growth (Pendall 2003). Whatever the underlying causes, such structural dynamics certainly act to disrupt communities no matter what feelings are being expressed about the issue.

Looking specifically at youth ages 0-17, as this is the demographic that most influences rural schools and public youth services, and can perhaps best be classified as "investing in the future," Eberts and Dixon (2006) find that, in upstate New York on the whole, four of the five town types demonstrate declining numbers from 1980 to 2000 (p. 9). Only More Dense Suburban Towns experienced an increase in this age range during the 1990s. Overall, according to Eberts and Dixon, in total numbers, towns lost a net of only about one percent (8,150 young people) of the total (815,257) between 1990 and 2000. The dynamics of this age group vary widely by region across New York State, with all town types in Eastern New York actually experiencing increases in their young people age 0-17 between 1990 and 2000 and all town types in Central and Northern New York experiencing decreases (Eberts & Dixon, 2006).

In general, although towns had fewer young people of this age range, they simultaneously experienced increases in the diversity of these young people, as African American and Hispanic youth grew in population in three town types (Eberts & Dixon, 2006). In Less Dense Rural towns, for

example, which experienced a net loss of 1,398 young people, the population of these two minority groups actually grew in this age category by 642 young people during the same period from 1990 to 2000.

Although much popular attention, including the 2006 *New York Times* piece cited above, has focused on the "brain drain" phenomena, academic research thus suggests that the picture is more complex than this simple term indicates. It may be more accurate and comprehensive to focus attention on patterns of relocation. As Eberts and Dixon (2006) conclude, the demographic evidence does indeed indicate that "relocation is taking place whether it is a brain drain or not" (p. 7). In order to conclude whether youth are leaving their communities and not returning—a true "brain drain"—would require detailed and systematic tracking of rural cohorts over time.

As Eberts and Dixon (2006) surmise, "We think of high school or college graduates moving to cities to work early in their careers, and, then, along with others seeking a less intensive life-style, eventually coming back to their home counties (adjacent suburbs) to raise families" (p.12). However, additional information challenges the accuracy of this perception. As cited in the *Rural Visioning Project Phase I Report* (CaRDI, 2006) a 1998 survey of Upstate residents in three counties found that almost one in every four survey participants, or 23.2%, reported that they anticipated moving out of state within the next two years (p.2). Importantly, the intention of moving out of the region was even stronger for residents in their 20s and 30s, for which one in three (32.5%) reported plans to move. In addition, in a 1999 poll conducted by M&T Bank, fully 40% of the 18-to-30-year-old upstate

residents polled indicated that they intended to move to another state within the next five years (as cited in Roberts, 2006).

Regardless of one's interpretation of youth out-migration or brain drain, a number of clear indicators even within our communities suggest that something is wrong with the way youth are currently engaged. The 2003 New York State Teen Assessment Program (TAP) survey data, set forth in *Contemporary Challenges to Rural Schools: A Social Scientist's Perspective on School Dropouts* (Eberts, 2006), indicates that almost half of students in the 11th grade (41.6%) classify themselves as not enjoying school, a percentage that rises from only 30% in the 7th grade. A quarter of students in the 11th grade (25.0%) express high or very high likelihood of cutting class or plans to drop out of school, a percentage that rises from only 15% in the 7th grade.

This alienation from school frequently manifests itself in the form of dropping out. Based on calculations per school day (defined as180 days of seven hours each day), Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson (2004) estimate a shocking dropout rate of one high school student per nine seconds. Recent studies, taking into account new formulas for calculating completion, dropout, and transfer rates, indicate that only approximately 2/3rds of high school students are graduating "on time," that is, in four years (Hirschman, Pharris-Ciurej, and Willhoft, 2006; Swanson, 2004). According to Sipple (2006), the new numbers are two to five times as large as the traditionally reported statewide dropout rate of approximately 5%. This more precise assessment of dropout rates, obtained by tracking new 9th graders in 2000 and then documenting the whereabouts of this same cohort four years later, reveals that only 67% of this cohort graduated after the four year period (Sipple, 2006).

According to *Contemporary Challenges to Rural Schools* (Eberts, 2006), the 2003 TAP report found eight main "triggers" associated with school drop-outs, including substance use and abuse, multiple sexual partners, poor grades, not enjoying school, feeling the teachers do not care, lacking parental support, suicide attempts, and having no adults in the county to turn to in times of stress (slide 4). In his attempt to generalize the complex interrelationships between these factors to a causal theory, Eberts defines the overarching problem that dropouts are struggling with issues of "community integration" (slide 11). This examination of the social science of high school dropouts establishes an inherent paradox between the competitive and individualistic norms promoted in school and the Constitutional norms of "equality, caring, [and] social justice" (Eberts, 2006, slide 14). Thus, a fundamental tension between individualism and community contributes to the underlying root of youth disengagement.

With this in mind, literature also points to the question of what can be done to counter this alienation and develop more effective relationships with youth. In order to promote engagement and deter drop-outs, the group associated with the Communities That Care (CTC) survey in Broome County, NY suggests that initiatives focus on four levels of "protective factors": Schools (and Teachers), Families (and Inclusion), Student (as an Individual), Community (and Interacting Adults) (as cited in Eberts, 2006, slide 10). In accordance with norms of positive youth development, all of these factors emphasize a focus on prosocial involvement and problem solving, in which youth can actively participate, make positive contributions, and experience constructive social interactions. In all four arenas—school, family, individual, and community—CTC largely emphasizes the importance

of facilitating opportunities for youth participation and decision-making and the creation of a sense of pride in youth achievements.

In line with the often cited adage "It takes a community to raise a child," literature suggests the importance of youth-community engagement to the overall success of the youth. Eberts (2006) further hypothesizes that when schools, communities, and parents demonstrate "caring communities" on a broader level, students will be less likely to experience this individual alienation that results in taking the action of dropping out of school (slide 12). According to this proposal, activities that encourage all community members, including school staff, parents, and non-school community leaders, to work "consciously and conscientiously" towards the creation of local community for students will engage students and deter dropouts (Eberts, 2006, slide 13).

A wealth of resources, studies, and dialogue have spoken on the perceived and real challenges facing rural schools and youth, and the overall implications of this for rural community vitality. Halfway across the country, in Fargo, North Dakota, organizations and individuals from across the Great Plains region convened in 2005 for the Prairie Rural Action (PRA) conference to discuss themes for rural revitalization. The resulting conference proceedings demonstrated a strong underlying focus on the connections between youth and community. Each focus group at the Prairie Rural Action conference framed a central question to capture the essence of their discussion. Among the questions posed at the PRA (2005), three in particular stand out for their relevance within the category of Rural Schools and Youth, and the theme of youth alienation:

1. "How can you successfully integrate the community into education?" (p.8)
2. "What type of [educational] courses will benefit rural America?" (p. 2)
3. "What will attract young people to rural areas?" (p. 7)

Participants in the "Primary/Secondary Education" focus group at this conference emphasized the importance of facilitating community cooperation and integration, through means such as transforming schools into "community learning centers," developing vocational education and agriculture programs, and using schools to centralize community amenities and services (PRA, 2005, p.7). Discussion of this theme identified a comprehensive need to transform the way education is valued, away from the individualistic model of "what can the school do for my child" and towards a more holistic model of "how can the education system contribute to [both] the community and my child"(PRA, 2005, p. 7). In this, the implication is that school and community revitalization are closely intertwined—schools revitalize themselves by being part of revitalizing the local community.

In the "Youth" focus group at the Prairie Rural Action conference, the inclusion of young people in the community activity planning process was highlighted as one potential way to potentially conquer the "there's nothing to do" syndrome (PRA, 2005, p.7). The "Higher Education" focus group suggested the need to involve the community in school meetings, use local knowledge, develop courses on local civic involvement, arrange internship opportunities with local businesses, and, in general, "connect learning with the needs of the community" (PRA, 2005, p. 2). Even

"Economic and Community Development" demonstrated a strong focus on youth-community engagement, with discussion suggesting the need to create programming which develops youth leadership, creates a more welcoming attitude towards youth in the community, encourages youth entrepreneurship, and promotes school-community partnerships (PRA, 2005, p.1).

Right here in New York State, between 1994 and 1996, the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources (NYSLCRR) conducted a *Vision 21* symposium and thirteen public hearings on the topic of K-12 public education. The *Vision 21* project focused on several main themes within education: Educational Mission; Student Personal Growth; Learning Atmosphere; The Clock and the Calendar; Staff Preparation and Development; Buildings, Transportation, and Equipment; Technology; Intergovernmental-Agency Cooperation; Finance; and Governance. The executive summary report of *New York's K-12 public education in the 21ˢᵗ Century: A framework for action* (NYSLCRR, 1997) lays out some of the recommendations that emerged based on excerpts from the proceedings of this *Vision 21* symposium and hearings.

Within this, "Educational Mission" emerges as the most comprehensive of these educational themes, with the *Vision 21* results demonstrating a clear focus not only on raising expectations and clearly articulating standards for students, but also on developing more interdisciplinary and practical experiences situated within the community context. The symposium workgroup developed the following mission statement: "The mission of schools in the 21ˢᵗ century is to provide cooperative and responsive education programs and services in order to enable all learners to excel"

(NYSLCRR, 1997, p.5). In order to attain this overall mission, several goals were articulated:

1. Raise expectations and articulate clear, statewide academic and life skills standards and requirements.

2. Provide interdisciplinary learning opportunities through such real-world experiences as community service, structured work experiences, mentoring situations. Infuse real-world standards and requirements into the schools.

3. Schools should be learning centers which engage the broader community in the education of children. (NYSLCRR, 1997, p.5)

Public hearing responses further underscored the importance of exposing students to real-world experiences, establishing mentoring, job shadowing, and community service programs, infusing real-world standards through the school-to-work concept, raising aspirations and standards for youth, tapping into the knowledge of community members to assist school curriculum, encouraging school/business partnerships, and making schools learning centers that are accessible to all members of the community beyond traditional school hours (NYSLCRR, 1997).

As these various initiatives demonstrate, a youth-community interface thus emerged as a central theme in the current dialogue about how to most effectively reduce rural youth alienation and more thoroughly engage rural students.

1.4 Objective

Within this context, this report sets out to answer various questions related to the current and future status of rural schools and youth in New York State. What are the purposes of education in these rural areas, as identified by residents? What unique advantages and disadvantages are identified by the people who know these rural areas and have a stake in them most intimately? What gaps currently exist within the education system? What policies and programmatic initiatives will help remedy this and ensure a vibrant future for these rural communities and their youth?

Using data collected from a series of Listening Sessions conducted throughout New York State in late 2005 and early 2006 as part of the Rural Visioning Project, as well as from several Youth Engagement activities also conducted as part of this project, this study explores the current state of rural schools and youth and makes recommendations for programs and policies as suggested through these sessions. As such, this project is intended for use by various stakeholders in the areas of rural schools, youth services, and youth development, or, more comprehensively, anyone interested or concerned about the future of rural communities.

Potential Audiences:
1. Rural school superintendents and administrators
2. Rural teachers and guidance counselors
3. Cooperative Extension
4. Youth organizations
5. County and State agencies that deal with youth

6. Other concerned citizens of the community, including youth and parents

Before proceeding, it is important to recognize that, although this report identifies and makes recommendations based on overarching themes that emerged from the Listening Sessions, one of the goals of the Rural Visioning Project was to identify and build upon key regional variations. Through their comments, participants emphasized the importance of retaining these regional differences and promoting systems which value unique, local strengths.

Along these lines, participants expressed concern that state-level policy often adopts a one-size-fits-all model, which is out of sync with needs in rural localities. Such concern is supported within the framework of academic literature as well. As Paul Nachtigal (1982) concludes, "A better fit is needed between local communities and the school system serving that community. Public policy, rules and regulations, and curriculum need to be carefully tailored to local needs; and one size/one style does not do the job" (p. 272). With this in mind, it is important to remember that the following report represents a broad attempt to generalize comments across localities and regions, and, thus, its actual applications will vary by individual community and region. As such, perhaps the most important lesson to emerge from the Rural Visioning Project may be that there is, in fact, no "one size fits all" model.

1.5 Summary

The importance of rural youth and the need for innovative rural education and programming emerges as a consistent theme across almost all areas of the dialogue about the future of rural New York. Concerns about youth development, workforce development, and community development seem, at the very least, potentially highly connected. From traditional concerns such as developing career awareness and preparation to more contemporary goals such as instilling a sense of community pride and civic engagement, education and youth services are described by residents of New York State as playing a critical role in rural community development—beginning now and extending into the future.

Education emerged as the issue most frequently identified as "extremely" and "very" important in both the youth and adult web-based Rural Visioning Survey, with approximately 93% of adults and 80% of youth ranking it in one of these two categories. Additionally, the current phenomena of out-migration and brain drain—in which youth, in response to a real or perceived lack of opportunity, leave their rural communities—was cited as one of the top ten issues facing Rural New York today, based on a compilation of the "Three Most Important Issues Facing Rural New York" surveys conducted at the Listening Sessions (Community and Rural Development Institute [CaRDI], 2006, p. 5). With this in mind, rural citizens of all ages recognize the critical importance of rural youth and education if their communities are to achieve a sustainable vision for both the present and the future.

1.6 Rural Visioning Project Overview

The Rural Visioning Project (RVP) evolved as a collaborative effort between Cornell's Community & Rural Development Institute (CaRDI), the Department of Development Sociology's *Rural New York Initiative* (RNYI), Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. According to the *Rural Visioning Project summary report: A vision for rural New York* (Rural Vision Initiative, 2006):

> The goal of the Rural Vision Initiative is to identify the short-term and long-term challenges and opportunities facing New York's rural communities. The Rural Vision Initiative aims to chart a clear vision for rural community and economic development to help guide policymakers in the decade ahead. (p.6)

In order to accomplish this hefty goal, the project was designed with a primary focus on collecting citizen input on issues and topics key to community development, specifically:

1. Economic Development
2. Workforce Development
3. Agriculture and Food Systems
4. Rural Schools and Youth
5. Poverty
6. Local and Regional Governance
7. Environment and Land Use
8. Housing and Transportation
9. Energy
10. Rural Health Care

11. Community Capacity and Social Networks

In nine regional conferences held throughout upstate New York and one statewide conference at a central location in Syracuse, the RVP brought together academics, policy-makers, community-level practitioners, and interested citizens, with a common focus on identifying emerging opportunities and challenging issues for rural New York. The multidisciplinary approach of this project emphasized the importance of thinking holistically about the future of rural New York and making connections between the above themes to highlight the realities (present) and hopes (future) of community development throughout the region.

Ultimately, citizen input obtained through Phase I of the RVP is intended for use by state and regional policymakers in developing a comprehensive action plan and corresponding state-level policies. In this way, the goal is to implement the effective community development policies and strategies that will enable rural New Yorkers to achieve their unique, self-identified regional future.

Chapter Two: Rural Visioning Project Listening Sessions

2.1 Data Collection Methods

The majority of data upon which this report is based came out of a series of Regional Listening Sessions held throughout New York State between December 2005 and May 2006 as part of the Rural Visioning Project, which brought together key stakeholders, policymakers, and academics from various regions of rural New York. In all, a total of eleven Listening Sessions held throughout upstate New York were attended by over 300 people during this period (NYSLCRR, 2006). Although a total of eleven Listening Sessions were held throughout the state, this report will focus exclusively on the results obtained from the nine Listening Sessions conducted in upstate New York, and will omit results from the two sessions held on Long Island.

Stakeholders for these Listening Sessions were identified by CaRDI based on recommendations from Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) Directors in each region. Participants included elected officials, CCE Directors and Educators, representatives from state agencies, non-profit organizations, small business owners, farmers and representatives from the agricultural sector, school officials, healthcare-agency providers, and so on. In addition, several members of the NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources were present at most sessions.

Invitations were sent out to approximately 120 targeted individuals in each region, with the general rationale that these individuals were representative of, and thus could speak to, overall public interest in each

region. For this reason, the Listening Sessions were not publicized through the general media; however, walk-in attendees—most of whom had either heard about the project through networks or word-of-mouth—were welcome. The response varied greatly by region, with Listening Sessions attended by anywhere from 15 to 50 participants. The average Listening Session was attended by about 40 people. In order to facilitate networking and the continued momentum of ideas generated at the Listening Sessions, a list of pre-registered participants, with their organizational affiliation and contact information, was provided to each attendee. Table 2.1 provides more detailed information about each of the nine Listening Sessions.

Table 2.1: Regional Listening Session Composition

Date	Location	Counties Represented	Sampling of Organizations/Individuals Represented[1]
12/16/2005	Van Etten, NY	Broome, Schuyler, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins	Hornell-Corning-Steuben Empire Zone; Cornell Migrant Program; Health Planning Council of Tompkins County; NY Farms; Tioga County Rural Economic Area Partnership (REAP); NYS Grange; Southern Tier East Region Planning Development Board; NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets
1/20/2006	Geneva, NY	Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne, Yates	(INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE)
1/26/2006	Liberty, NY	Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster, Westchester	(INFORMATION NOT AVAILABLE)
2/9/2006	Tully, NY	Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego, Otsego, Oneida	New York Forest Owners Association; American Farmland Trust; Seven Valleys Health Coalition; Opportunities for Chenango; Central New York Area Health Education Center; NYS Grange; Mithoefer Center for Rural Surgery; New York State Urban Council; Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield of the Utica Region

---

[1] This sampling is based on registration lists generated before the Listening Sessions, and, as such, actual attendance likely varied. In addition, various participants affiliated with Cornell Cooperative Extension and its numerous branches, Cornell University, and the NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources were present at each Listening Session. In addition, each Listening Session included participants representative of the local towns and villages (both elected and appointed), such as mayors, township engineers, economic development directors, village trustees, councilmen, etc.

Table 2.1 (Continued)

2/23/2006	Voorheesville, NY	Albany, Columbia, Delaware, Fulton, Green, Montgomery, Schenectady, Schoharie	NYS Farm Bureau; Fulton County Community College; FarmNet; Community Action Program of Schoharie County; ASAPP's Promise of Fulton County; New York State Canal Corporation; Department of Public Health; NYS Governor's Office of Small Cities; Albany County Department of Economic Development, Conservation, and Planning; Otsego County Employment and Training; NYS Quality Communities Program; Brenner Realty; Molnar Financial Group; consultant forestry
3/2/2006	East Aurora, NY	Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, Wyoming	Chautauqua County Health Network; Genessee/ Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council; Lenape Resources, Inc.; Healthy Communities Alliance; Chautauqua Home Rehabilitation and Improvement Corporation; E3 Communications
3/16/2006	Watertown, NY	Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence[2]	Tug Hill Commission, NY Rural Health Care Alliance, NYS Grange; New York Power Authority; Alliance for Regional Stewardship

Table 2.1 (Continued)

3/17/2006	Malone, NY	Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence[2]	NYS Association for Rural Health; Essex County Industrial Development; Clinton Community College; Fuller Communications; St. Lawrence County Soil and Water Conservation District; Adirondack Park Agency; Adirondack Community Action Program; St. Lawrence County Health Initiative; Adirondack Land Trust; Housing Assistance Program of Essex County; Wild Orchard Farm; NY Farm Bureau; Franklin County Empire Zone; Northern NY Planned Parenthood
3/23/2006	Ballston Spa, NY	Hamilton, Herkimer, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Warren, Washington	Colgate University Center for Outreach, Volunteerism, & Education; The Upstate Institute; NYS Agricultural Mediation Program; Herkimer County Health Network

Each three hour Listening Session was structured to allow for a range of whole-group interactions, random small-groupings, and also self-selected interactions based on interest in theme areas. Appendix A contains a sample of the some of the material provided in the participant packets, including an exact agenda of the breakdown of session activities.

After participant introductions and a brief overview of the Rural Visioning Project by executive members of CaRDI and the Legislative Commission, the interactive and information-generating part of each session began with participants working in small groups with one or two individuals

---

[2] Because the expansive nature of these North Country counties may otherwise have made it impractical for participants to drive to one central location, two consecutive Listening Sessions for this region were held in North Country towns approximately 100 miles apart.

around them to identify the top three issues that they see facing rural New York. Groups were given about ten minutes to compile one written list representing their collective top three issues. These lists were then collected to be typed and tabulated for use by the RVP.

From there, the session moved into various breakout groups, which allowed participants to delve into detailed examinations of pre-identified major thematic areas. These eleven theme areas remained consistent throughout all the regional Listening Sessions to allow for standardization and inter-regional comparison. Three half-hour rotations allowed for a total of an hour-and-a-half for this major discussion and data collection portion of each Listening Session.

Theme areas were separated into two groupings. For the first and second half-hour rotations, participants were asked to choose between the following major themes for their small group discussions: Economic Development; Agriculture and Food Systems; Environment, Land Use, and Natural Resources; Rural Schools and Youth; Local and Regional Governance; and Poverty. For the final half-hour rotation, the theme area options changed and participants were given the choice between: Rural Health Care; Housing and Transportation; Energy; Workforce Development; and Community Capacity and Social Networks.

Within this overall structure, participants were allowed complete freedom in choosing between theme areas, and there were no maximums or minimums established in terms of the number of participants in each group. Thus, for example, if in one session, there were fifteen participants interested in discussing the Rural Schools and Youth theme, and only two interested in discussing the Poverty theme, no attempt was made to even out the groups.

If one person found him/herself alone at a theme station, he/she would typically find another group to join for that rotation with the rationale that theme areas were highly interrelated and his/her area of true interest could be incorporated into a group with more potential for dialogue. This hands-off approach to group selection helped to ensure that all participants could speak on the themes about which they were the most interested and passionate, and thus about which they likely had the most to share.

A facilitator, who was charged with structuring the flow of discussion and recording/capturing participants' ideas and statements, led each small group session. In this, facilitators played a key role in attempting to promote reasonably equal participation among members of the theme group, ensuring that no one participant would dominate conversation and that everyone had the opportunity to be heard. Facilitators included Rural Visioning Project team members, such as Community and Rural Development Institute staff and Cornell University students involved with the RVP (myself included), and members of county Cornell Cooperative Extension who had been recruited by the project. In general, facilitators associated with CaRDI remained the same at all nine Listening Sessions throughout the state, while the facilitators associated with county Cornell Cooperative Extension varied by region and thus were only present at the one Listening Session held in their respective region. Although there was no formal facilitator training, facilitators were intended to play a largely passive role in guiding the thematic discussions, not coloring the shape of discussion or pushing their personal views.

As participants brainstormed and discussed, the facilitator recorded key ideas and statements under the appropriate headings on large flipcharts

displayed at the front of each small group. It is important to note that these sheets of paper, as recorded by the theme area facilitators, served as the only primary documentation of the ideas generated during the breakout groups of the Listening Sessions. There was no video or audio tape recording of the sessions. Categories for discussion within each theme area (flipchart headings) were:

1. Current status (divided into strengths, "what works," and weaknesses, "what doesn't work")
2. Desired future/outcomes (in 10-20 years)
3. Suggested action steps (what is required to get from the current status to the desired future)
4. Existing success stories and models
5. Emerging opportunities
6. Further research needed

After 30 minutes of this structured discussion, participants were asked to move the next theme area of their choice. Facilitators remained at their assigned area through both of the first two rotations, and began the second group discussion of their theme with a brief review of what had been discussed at the first session. In recording comments made during the Listening Session, it was not required that facilitators differentiate between which comments came from which of these two rotations through their theme area.

Upon completion of this second half-hour rotation, the theme area options were changed and the process was begun anew with participants' now selecting one theme area from the second grouping.

After an hour-and-a-half of thus rotating through the three theme areas of their choice, participants were brought back together as a whole for a group discussion. This discussion was open-ended and allowed whoever wanted to speak a chance to have the floor one at a time. After being recognized to speak, participants were asked to state their name and where they were from before sharing their comment. Various members of CaRDI took detailed hand-written notes during this part of the Listening Session.

Before leaving the Regional Listening Session, all participants were asked to fill out a "Summary Worksheet," viewable in Appendix A. In addition to providing a means for participants to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Listening Session itself, this worksheet served as a final forum by which participants could air anything that they did not, for whatever reason, have the opportunity to say during any of the other discussions.

After each Listening Session, all of the newsprint sheets of writing, as recorded by the breakout group facilitators, were collected and brought back to the CaRDI office at Cornell University. Word for word, each sheet of this primary data was then typed into computer documents by either me or another student assistant. After verifying the authenticity of the typed documents against the newsprint, the typed version was then edited and honed into the "Summary Notes" that formed the basis of all further analysis. During this process, the six detailed categories from the original Listening Session discussion were whittled down into the final, more general four categories to be used for the remainder of the RVP:

1. What works (current strengths)
2. What doesn't work (current weaknesses)

3. Desired outcomes
4. What is needed (further research, policy/programmatic suggestions)

The data contained in these documents then became the basis for all further analysis.

For those who were unable to attend a Listening Session in person, a web-based survey provided an alternative forum for participation. As of late June 2006, at the time the final report for Phase I of the Rural Visioning Project was compiled, approximately 72 citizens had participated in the online survey. For the sake of this report, these responses are considered equally with, and are not differentiated from, those generated during the actual regional Listening Sessions.

2.2 Limitations

By their very nature, the RVP Listening Sessions were designed as a "grass-roots" rather than a "scientific" process (CaRDI, 2006, p.5). As such, the data are inherently influenced by who was, and, perhaps more poignantly, who was *not*, at the table during these Listening Sessions. Although billed as "grass-roots," which, according to Princeton University's WordNet (2001), is suggestive of "common people at a local level" no attempt was made to attract rural citizens outside of the realm of the Cornell Cooperative Extension community. As previously mentioned, the RVP relied primarily on invitees identified by CCE Executive Directors in each region, thus implying that most participants were likely to already have had some contact within this network and likely have had a precedent of being

actively engaged as concerned citizens within their communities. Although the overall Listening Session results were characterized in the *Phase I Report* (CaRDI, 2006) as being "surprisingly cohesive" (p.3), given the knowledge that, by design, the majority of attendees were identified and invited by only a few people in each region, one is left wondering whether the cohesion is really that surprising after all.

In fact, the very scheduling of these sessions for weekdays, during working hours, would have been prohibitive for many average, working-class rural community members—even had they been aware of, or interested in, the project. For example, in order for the average school teacher to have been able to participate in a Listening Session, he/she would have had to be absent for all or part of a school day, necessitating the use of a classroom substitute and thus disrupting the classroom environment. In order for an hourly-wage earning blue-collar worker to have attended a Listening Session, he/she would have had to take a personal day and endure a corresponding loss of wages.

Perhaps the most notably absent voices are those of the marginalized and disenfranchised community members who live and/or work in New York's rural communities —including the poor, elderly, infirm, minority, transient, and illiterate residents. Again by RVP design, no effort was made to actively reach out and include the unique voices of such people, despite the fact that they are indeed part of the socio-economically diverse population of rural New York. While no one would have been turned away or prevented from participating had he or she simply showed up at the region's Listening Session, the marginalized nature of these particular social groupings made this possibility virtually nil– meaning that the omission of

active outreach to members of these groupings essentially served the same functional purpose as would have been accomplished by excluding them from the proceedings outright.

Interestingly, the limitation of inclusiveness was consistently identified by Listening Session participants themselves as one aspect of the RVP that could be improved upon, as described in Participant Evaluations of Listening Sessions in the RVP Phase I Report (CaRDI, 2006, p. 171-2). In their evaluation comments, participants articulated a need to include a more "full range of participants" at these sessions in order for the process to be truly effective as a grass-roots initiative (CaRDI, 2006, p. 171). Specifically mentioned as missing-but-necessary participants were members of other ethnic groups, educators, working land-owners and land-users, local business people, and youth—groups that Listening Session participants see living and/or working in their rural communities, but did not see present at the Rural Visioning Project Listening Sessions. Participant evaluations suggest that, while participants enjoyed engaging with the diversity of opinion that was present, they simultaneously recognized that this diversity would have been enhanced had there been a greater diversity of types of people in attendance. In the words of one participant, there is a need to "bring the listening session to the local level and give community members a chance to participate and have a voice" (CaRDI, 2006, p. 171).

In addition to this fundamental limitation in terms of participation in the Listening Sessions, several limitations also must be addressed in terms of the actual data collection itself. Even within the limited scope of just who was invited to these Listening Sessions, no attempt was made to keep a record of attendance in each theme group or to track who made which

comment during the theme group discussions. On the broadest level, given the fact that no attempt was made to balance the number of participants in each theme group, the comments could potentially reflect the views of just a few isolated participants. Data collected from theme areas with two participants was not distinguished from data collected from theme areas with twelve participants-- despite that such data are likely be less representative of general public opinion with fewer perspectives engaged in the dialogue to generate the data.

Moving beyond sheer numbers, no record was maintained of which Listening Session registrants elected to participate in one particular theme group as opposed to a different theme group. As acknowledged in the New York State Rural Vision Project *Phase I Report* (CaRDI, 2006), "Each listening session had a particular mix of attendees, with some sessions experiencing more representation from CCE, some from local citizens, and others from social service agencies. Therefore, the information [that the project] gathered is likely to reflect these perspectives" (p. 5). Without having tracked just which attendees participated in which theme group, however, it is difficult to determine either the overt or subtle ways in which the information gathered may have been influenced by the unique perspective of the participants. In looking back upon the comments made during the Rural Schools and Youth breakout theme, for example, it is possible that the group was composed of entirely parents and educators at one regional Listening Session, and entirely businesspeople and elected officials at another region's session. Even within the same regional Listening Session, it is possible that mini-networks composed of participants with certain pre-existing affiliations (such as members of a local Chamber of Commerce or local Parent Teachers

Association)—who would be likely to share similar views—may have chosen to participate together within one breakout area. In a theme group with three people, it would be possible for all three participants to have been affiliated with the same organization—thereby contributing to a potential bias in the data that would not have been noted in the official record. In addition, among theme participants in Rural Schools and Youth, we further have no way of knowing which particular comments may have been by educators and which comments by parents, and so forth.

The lack of tracking makes it impossible to look back upon the data collected and analyze possible trends or disparities among key stakeholders. For instance, do school administrators and local government officials view rural schools in the same light? Do local businesspeople and farmers—as representative of two key sectors of rural employment—see vocational education as a positive or negative force in rural education? How do public policymakers and county extension educators differ in their views of the importance of rural schools to community health? Do parents and non-parents, regardless of their occupational affiliations, desire a similar future for rural schools and youth? With no record of which views belong to which participants, these questions remain unanswered despite the best intentions of the Rural Visioning Project. More detailed tracking information would have allowed us to draw comparisons among the perspectives of various community stakeholders, to see which views were shared between groups and which may be more isolated, and thus to make a thorough analysis of the data collected by examining the underlying interests and potential agendas behind the comments.

Further contributing to the limitations in terms of the data collection itself, although facilitators were asked to remain neutral and unbiased—serving mainly to keep discussion on track and to record participant comments—in reality, from personal experience, they often served as active participants in the discussion. Wherever possible, facilitators were assigned to theme areas based on their personal areas of interest and/or expertise—which also meant that the facilitators themselves often had a lot to say about a topic, and could potentially guide conversation towards their own agenda or, to borrow a popular idiom, put words in the mouths of the participants. Regardless of whether these were conscientious or inadvertent acts, in such cases, it is entirely possible that, given the exact same group of participants but a different facilitator, the "results" may have been substantially different. Without any sort of uniform facilitator training or clearly delineated guidelines, it is difficult to know just how the facilitators influenced the discussion—and thereby, the results.

In line with this limitation, any analysis of comments made during the small group discussion portion of the Listening Sessions rests on the assumption that the facilitators were able to transcribe the exact meaning of what was said, and what was meant, by participants during the discussion. Without any sort of direct audio documentation, it is impossible to go back and reference the context of a particular comment or double check that all ideas—no matter how briefly they may have been discussed– were captured. Reading through the rough phrases and sentences, one is left to wonder which are direct participant quotations and which are mere paraphrases jotted down to the best of the facilitator's ability that may not actually capture the true meaning of what a participant intended.

Given the often fast-paced and passionate nature of small group breakout discussions, it was understandably difficult for facilitators to simultaneously listen to the continuing discussion and keep up with recording the barrage of resulting ideas. Conversation did not usually cease, or even slow down, in order to allow facilitators time to record—yet recording exact ideas and phrases as intended by Listening Session participants was of the utmost importance to the data collection portion of the RVP. Adding to the urgency of the recording of comments, a comment missed by a group facilitator would potentially be lost from the record and thus from the data that form the basis of the entire Rural Visioning Project. Speaking from personal experience as a facilitator in such a situation, it was simply not possible to capture everything word for word—rather, there was only a split-second in which to jot down a succinct phrase to capture the essence of a comment or attempt to paraphrase what was being said.

Taking this situation step further, analysis of these comments further assumes that the raw data from these original flip-charts, as recorded by the facilitators at the Listening Sessions, was then accurately and appropriately transcribed into the computer documents that became the basis for all further analysis by CaRDI and the RVP. In trying to transcribe and edit these primary notes from the handwritten newsprint into the computer documents, we at the CaRDI office frequently encountered obstacles that made it difficult to be certain that the exact meanings were retained. Difficulties reading handwriting, interpreting abbreviations, and following convoluted arrows, corrections, and additions on the flipcharts from the Listening Sessions all contributed potential for error.

Again such obstacles were likely the result of the harried nature of the facilitators trying to quickly and succinctly capture what was being said by participants, and, again, with no audio documentation, there was no way by which to ascertain exactly what the original context was. In addition, with no record of who had first made a particular comment at the Listening Session, there was no means by which to return to the primary source for clarification.

In essence, although publicized and analyzed essentially as primary data, the words of Listening Session participants thus actually had to pass through at least *two* filters before reaching the final stage for analysis: the initial filter between what was spoken by the participant and how the remark was recorded by the facilitator, and then a secondary filter between what was handwritten by the facilitator and how that was then transcribed into the final computerized document by the team working in the CaRDI office.

With these things in mind, the data collected from the RVP Listening Sessions—forming the basis for this report and all further analysis—is perhaps most appropriately viewed as the closest and most comprehensive representation of public sentiment available to-date, rather than as an exact record of what was said at the Listening Sessions. Such an idea brings us full circle to emphasize again that this means of information gathering was not intended as a " 'scientific' method of data collection" (*CaRDI,* 2006, p. 5), but rather as a sampling with the goal of setting forth a guide by which to better understand and improve conditions in rural New York.

As such, though it is important to be aware of the limitations inherent to the Listening Sessions as designed and carried out, it is also necessary to recognize this first phase of the Rural Visioning Project as an unprecedented

learning process—the information from which represents a critical first-step towards achieving a more comprehensive understanding of rural New York's challenges and opportunities through the first-hand accounts of its residents.

2.3 Findings

While remaining conscious of the data limitations described previously, "Rural Schools and Youth" emerges as a comprehensive theme with important implications for the overall health and sustainability of Rural New York. Issues pertaining directly to Rural Schools and Youth were often cited by participants in their discussion of other theme areas—most prevalently in the areas of Rural Economic Development (where issues of Rural Schools and Youth were cited in this theme at fully 9 out of 9 Listening Sessions), Agriculture and Food Systems (8 out of 9 Listening Sessions), Community Capacity and Social Networks (7 out of 7 Listening Sessions at which this theme area was discussed), Workforce Development (6 out of 6 Listening Sessions), and Poverty (8 out of 8 Listening Sessions)—suggesting a strong linkage between rural schools and youth and these other aspects of overall community viability.

In addition, concerns relating to Rural Schools and Youth consistently emerged in the top three issues identified as currently facing rural New York, having been listed as such by small groups at eight out of nine Listening Sessions during the "Three Most Important Issues Impacting Rural New York" warm-up exercises. In their compilation of the most frequently cited top issues across all of the Listening Sessions—based on analysis of these "Three Most Important Issue" lists— CaRDI (2006, p. 5) includes both the

issue of education and youth flight/out-migration/brain drain in their comprehensive listing of "Top Issues Identified" as facing Rural New York.

Turning more specifically to the information collected within the Rural Schools and Youth theme group itself, our initial review of the findings will follow the same flow of organization used during the Listening Sessions. This part of the section is organized according to findings in each of the categories of

1. What works (current strengths)
2. What doesn't work (current weaknesses)
3. Desired outcomes
4. What is needed (further research, policy/programmatic suggestions)

After thus conducting an overview of these compartmentalized findings, we will then briefly summarize the overall picture of Rural Schools and Youth that emerged from these findings in order to better understand the major themes and interconnections.

In reading through this section, it is important to note that the subsequent review of findings focuses solely on information obtained during the Rural Schools and Youth theme discussions, and is not cross-referenced against relevant findings from any of the other ten theme areas.

2.3.1 What Works (Current Strengths)

At five of the nine Listening Sessions, positive comments regarding the current state of rural schools and youth reflected the perception that small schools and class sizes often found in rural areas offer increased

opportunities for active participation and help foster meaningful and productive connections between teachers and students. To this end, representative comments included:

> Small class sizes may help foster connection between teachers and students (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)
>
> Rural kids get more opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities -- less competition and more access (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)
>
> Family oriented, caring schools – small size potential for bonding, camaraderie, tight-knit class (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)
>
> Opportunity for hands-on community experiences (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)
>
> Teachers may have ability to connect more one-on-one with kids in rural settings; Smaller schools may be more personal, e.g. guidance (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)
>
> More personal interest and connection in smaller schools; Small schools= increased kid involvement and opportunity (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006)
>
> Recognizing accomplishments (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

Several existing programs are specifically described as particularly beneficial to rural youth and communities, for their role in linking state standards with local community and workforce needs. BOCES and community colleges were collectively mentioned at seven out of nine Listening Sessions as institutions which positively impact rural schools, youth, and communities:

BOCES helps bring special expertise to help meet state standards (East Aurora, NY, 3/2/2006)

BOCES provides targeted education/training/skills that help local labor force needs (Liberty, NY, 1/26/2006)

BOCES may help with flexible learning styles and standardization (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Community college connection (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

Community colleges help with Post-HS training and college classes; e.g. freshmen training (Van Etten, NY 12/16/2005)

Schools are working to address youth departure through economic development and education initiatives (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

School to work program was successful (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Participants in the Regional Listening Sessions also emphasized that rural schools have strong community support, and occupy an integral position as centers of the community. At the same time that the community provides a context for hands-on educational experiences for rural students, the school itself is seen as an essential community-building tool. Comments emphasizing the existence of a positive linkage between rural schools and communities were made at seven out of nine Listening Sessions, and include the following:

"Community raises a child" – we [rural areas] have advantage in this area; Opportunity for hands-on community experiences (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Rural schools have strong community support; Schools provide a focus and identity for promoting community and economic development (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

Alternative/community schools - some indicators that alt./community schools are superior for some students – maybe more advantageous than regent system (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

Schools as center of the community – fosters community unity from sports and other activities (even people without kids participate) (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

Schools are often center of the community; foster connectivity that impacts student success. Small schools are cornerstone of local communities (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Some youth get very engaged with community issues; Kids and families have greater sense of connection to place (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

After-school programs may help low-income kids and kids in homes that don't stress education; Many kid-based programs also help adults/parents re: increase awareness of availability of other resources/programs (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006)

Community investment in the hiring process (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

2.3.2 What Doesn't Work (Current Weaknesses)

Participants in the regional Listening Sessions mentioned a variety of negative indicators that they see plaguing youth in their rural communities—including high rates of teen pregnancy, substance abuse, suicide, and school dropouts. In all, such social problems were described at six out of nine Listening Sessions, with the most frequently cited concern being the high rate of high school dropouts (specifically mentioned at five out of nine Listening Sessions).

To a large extent, negative comments regarding the current state of rural schools and rural education reflect the perception that the present focus on NYS Regents examinations and national standards have resulted in an educational system that focuses on standardized tests at the expense of more functional learning. "Teaching to the test" was negatively mentioned at no less than four of the Listening Sessions, while comments at three Listening Sessions specifically named a disconcerting "mismatch" between education and reality. Concerns regarding this rigid educational paradigm were cited at six of nine Listening Sessions, with the following representative comments:

> Too much pressure to "teach for the test" – leaves little time to expand and experience outside classroom – other workforce standards, such as Career Development Occupational, are subjective, difficult to standardize/measure (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Regents rules do not serve students well, only increase stress – teaching for the test and too much funneling and standardizing – not teaching "how to learn" (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

If teaching and testing standards are too rigid, they can't adapt and shift to changing economy and workforce needs; With so many requirements, leaves little time for local flexibility (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006)

Too many standards for testing – limits time, flexibility, ability to approach new subjects, ideas, and build skills (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Regents education may help some kids graduate, but isn't tied to workforce development – the redesigned system is destructive. The system only teaches for the test (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Mismatch between skill sets taught in high-school and those needed for college preparation (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006); Mismatch between local education and local workforce and economic development needs (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006); Regent System "broken". Mismatch between expectations of regent system and the direction rural youth should take (Van Etten, NY 12/16/2005)

BOCES and other forms of Career and Technical Education are perceived as suffering greatly from a negative image and lack of respect, with little opportunity for students to explore and/or move between these vocational educational tracks and college preparatory tracks. Along these lines, youth who are on the college track are often unjustly thought to be

more talented, and are thus trained to be "exported" away from the local community—resulting in what participants describe as a declining population of educated young people in their rural areas. In general, such problems associated with educational tracking and its effects upon the community were emphasized at six of the nine Listening Sessions, and included the following comments:

> 'Tracks' can be rigid --college v. BOCES (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006)
>
> Barriers between vocational and academic social groups (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)
>
> "Branding" difficult to break out (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)
>
> Stigma attached to BOCES education (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006);
>
> BOCES has an image problem (Van Etten, NY, 12/ 16/ 2005);
>
> Stigma of BOCES and CTE (Voorheesville, NY, 2/ 23/ 2006)
>
> Guidance counselors trained to export educated children away from the area (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)
>
> Too many talented youth leave the community (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Another frequently cited concern revolves around the general lack of resources available to rural schools and youth. Because of the lower population and smaller school size in rural areas, participants suggested that course offerings and extra-curricular activities are generally more limited in scope—a weakness mentioned at seven of the nine Listening Sessions. Rural areas often face difficulty in attracting and retaining quality teachers and leadership—a problem brought to light in this section at five of the Sessions.

The issue of school funding itself emerges an oft-mentioned concern among participants in the Rural Schools and Youth focus groups—actually having been cited at all nine Listening Sessions. Specifically, given the current state of property-tax-based school funding, declining enrollments often result in a further lack of resources available for rural education and youth services. A sampling of the variety of comments pertaining to this dearth of resources, including associated problems of funding, includes:

Lack of school and community services for youth due to resources (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

Declining resources-- reduced activities, course offerings, may lead to consolidation, less rich education (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Declining enrollments and decreased tax base to support schools (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Uneven distribution of resources, physical facilities, teaching, funding, technology – ties to poverty, low tax base (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006);

Schools are struggling due to administrative burden, with low population and tax base (East Aurora, NY, 3/2/2006)

Consolidation may save money and have other benefits – but local control, access, and identity are diminished (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Rural schools don't often have the capacity to compete for outside grants (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Rural youth not always aware of or exposed to the full and rich range of opportunities and possibilities (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

2.3.3 Desired Outcomes

Speaking to the future of rural schools and youth, comments at eight of the nine Listening Sessions expressed a desire for increased connections between school and career and better linkages between youth and local business. Findings reflect a desire for educated youth to remain in, or return to, the local area—with participants at six of the nine Listening Sessions mentioning this as a priority outcome. On this topic, comments recognize strong ties between education, local economic opportunity, and youth retention in rural communities:

> Keep youth in the area – want multi-generational towns – i.e. recruitment of returning kids to meet community workforce needs (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)
>
> Greater retention of youth through creation of viable jobs with county, AND attract college educated youth back (Liberty, NY, 1/26/2006)
>
> Better connections between school and career starting at a younger age to gain more exposure - partnerships between schools and local businesses (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)
>
> Better match and communication between local education and local and regional workforce needs (Tully, NY, 2/ 9/ 2006)
>
> Develop training in local labor shortage areas to provide more incentives for youth to stay or return (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Adequate redefinition of workforce/college preparation, considering future labor needs and economic development (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Education should lead to local work connection with local business—local business investment in youth will improve their future workforce e: stability and retention (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Create more Local/regional "rootedness" in economic opportunities, strategies, vs. globalization and loss of local identity (East Aurora, NY, 3/2/2006)

Findings that describe the desired future of rural schools and youth suggest hope for increasing valuation of the broader school-community relationship. Within the educational system, in terms of curriculum and programming, overall comments reflected a desire for more differentiated education with the increased flexibility that would allow for community involvement and active learning. To this end, commonly cited desired outcomes within the academic system include increasing education for agriculture and rural culture (mentioned at five Listening Sessions); a new emphasis on health—both mental and physical—and practical life skills (mentioned at six Sessions); the use of technology to enhance academics (mentioned at four Sessions); the implementation of more hands-on, experiential learning techniques (mentioned at four Sessions); and a positive focus on BOCES programs (mentioned at four sessions).

Educating students about their local community will increase integration, increase their investment and decrease migration (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Instill a sense of place and pride in "ruralness" and ag-related heritage – show value of historic relevance, physical assets (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Increased activities may increase local engagement (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Need formal standardization of field work - outside of classroom experiences, equalizing the value of vocational and academic education (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

More local control over programming (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

More community involvement in schools – explore youth development strategies – increase connection between county and school organizations (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Reduce the number of standardized tests, or eliminate current testing methods - give schools more flexibility in curriculum , integrate service learning into routine curriculum; Not just filling a requirement, but have active experiences throughout education (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Realize value of skilled high school grads that are not college bound (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Need more emphasis on math, technology—[ease the] tension in rural areas between older agrarian way of life and new, high tech environment and economy (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

Need a more complete health and well-being curriculum –

nutrition, etc., not just one semester – healthy lifestyles; Need

teaching of life/social skills (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006)

Increasing technology infrastructure, distance learning, electronic

field trips will increase productivity and access (Tully, NY,

2/9/2006)

Overall, participants hope to see increased opportunities for all rural
youth-- both inside and outside of school itself. At five Listening Sessions,
comments emphasized that these opportunities should reflect the unique,
changing demographic of their areas and consider children with special
needs, financial need, and non-traditional family structure.

Youth services that are appropriate and targeted to current youth

needs—traditional programming needs to be updated, youth need

to be involved in designing their own programs (Liberty, NY,

1/26/2006)

All youth need to have complete awareness of possible future

paths, regardless of place, income, etc (Ballston Spa, NY,

3/23/2006)

Increase activities and experiences and service-learning outside of

school (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006)

Increase opportunities for kids who may not have financial and/or

family structure to support participation (Malone, NY ,

3/17/2006)

Teacher training should reflect diversity so that all kids are

included in classrooms (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Afterschool programs for changing demographic – family values,

guidance, 4H, scouts – in all schools and for all ages

(Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

Every High school student should have access to college credit

regardless of family incentives (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Participants express hope for greater coordination and partnerships that will benefit rural schools and youth, including stronger connections with institutions of higher education (mentioned at five Listening Sessions) and more collaboration between local and regional schools and school districts (five Listening Sessions). Specifically, this desired cooperation includes means such as increasing the availability of college course offerings to local schools, working together on special curriculum projects, and sharing school administrators and other resources within districts. In terms of this desired future, although consolidation was specifically mentioned, in one form or another, as desirable at three of the Listening Sessions, the importance of connections and cooperation thus proved to be a more widely discussed theme—having been mentioned as desirable at a total of six Listening Sessions.

Promote partnerships between districts on curriculum, special

projects – increase connection with community colleges (Geneva,

NY, 1/20/2006)

Greater cooperation among school districts– sharing resources

(Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Coordination between school districts, need to understand

ownership issues (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

Increase intra-school district collaboration (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

More sharing, collaboration between districts – beyond school closings and consolidation – better communication (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Better outreach from Cornell and other educational institutions to Rural schools for educational support (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006); More connections with higher education institutions and community college (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

One county school superintendent rather than each district – need to determine how schools lobby for funding (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Consolidate rural schools which have low student population, at least on an administrative level (East Aurora, NY, 3/2/2006)

2.3.4 What is Needed

In this section, participants were asked to describe what is needed (in terms of further research and policy/ programs) in order to move from the current state of rural schools and youth to the desired future. Broadly, comments to this end focus on developing innovative ways to more fully utilize resources. In addition, many programs were specifically brought forth as "success stories" during this segment of the Listening Sessions. *Please note that these success stories are marked with a hollow bullet point in the following findings.*

Comments in this theme at no fewer than six of nine Listening Sessions reflect the recognition that education and economic development

are inherently complementary. In accordance with this, Listening Session participants emphasized a need for more programs that link local schools and business, through means such as internships and job shadowing—bringing forth numerous programs as success stories in this area. Participants also stressed the importance of promoting overall economic development in their rural communities.

> Inter-relationship of education, youth retention, workforce development – need good paying jobs based on resources we have (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)
>
> Promote economic development locally to attract new youth and bring in new ideas – example - Canandaigua Center for Excellence - business sharing an interest in youth, mentoring, career exploration. Investment in youth will strengthen future workforce, improve stability and retention (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)
>
> Schools and economic development are intertwined--All issues interconnected; Provide a better local economic environment for youth to graduate into and stay locally (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)
>
> How to create, retain and build jobs (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)
>
> Earlier career awareness for younger students—8th graders—visit BOCES center—career "job shadowing" and internships (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)
>
> Research in projecting needed future labor and help schools partner with preparing students (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

- o BOCES, community colleges and chamber of commerce sponsored event, brought in ~ 900 H.S. seniors held at Jefferson

community college to talk with employers in region and to talk about how schools can better educate kids to be more productive to enter workforce/college – expanded internship program – combine education and workplace experiences (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

- o Success: 1) EOC, SUNY program for training post high school trade – aimed at low income (Troy), Americorps opportunities – internship and stipends (for any type of post secondary education) for college, work within home county; 2)Hudson-Mohawk Area Health Education Center systems—statewide program for k-12 healthcare professions awareness (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)
- o Success: summer youth employment programs (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

Comments from the Listening Sessions established a need to re-examine what to teach and how to teach it. In terms of frequently mentioned policy and programmatic suggestions, a need to increase school-community collaboration was directly mentioned at no less than three Listening Sessions, and was further implied through successful programs described at several others. Localized education, either in contrast with the state and national forms of standards-based education, or as a means of enhancing such standards, was identified as a suggested policy or program at four Listening Sessions. Along these lines, the programs most consistently mentioned in this category included: BOCES (five Listening Sessions), agricultural education (four Listening Sessions), and various forms of active, hands-on learning (four Listening Sessions).

Need research to show that experiential education in K-12 is advantageous –lead to its support as a curriculum requirement (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Need to increase engagement in community and individual activities at earlier age - schools need to instill a sense of ownership and stake in community at an earlier age – these enriched activities may decrease drug abuse and depression; Engagement in community – class projects, to provide an active experience consistent throughout primary and secondary education (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Need framework to build greater community- school collaboration (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Need to teach youth more local history to instill a greater sense of pride (East Auora, NY, 3/2/2006)

Local schools need to respond to local needs (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

Need to be competitive in the market place and in college—need to be current in hi-tech urban opportunities (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

Increased funds for CCE programs that support youth life development and leisure activities – specific rural programming (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Rural schools have strong community support—potential for more community use and investment (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

Eliminate Regents Program in NY—conflict between localized education and state level rules (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

- o 'Ag in the Classroom' is the beginning of a successful program that needs to be more used and developed (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006)
- o Increase agricultural education in schools—wildlife habitat, natural resources -- Pen Yan is a good example (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)
- o Audubon Society (Jamestown) Chautauqua Co. provides environmental education through BOCES – bring special expertise to help meet state standards (East Aurora, 3/2/2006)

Furthermore, the need to adopt a more holistic approach to the development of rural school and youth programming was emphasized by participants at no fewer than six Listening Sessions. To this end, quality of life and youth development issues—including a focus on overall youth well-being, both physical and mental—emerged as a needed focus.

Need to focus on how to retain kids—quality of life issues to retain creative classes and youth (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

Increased funds for CCE programs that support youth life development (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Recruit back young families—"quality of life" (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Connection between nutrition and performance (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Need to address daycare issues (pros and cons), one-on-one needs (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

- o Successes: Personal Wellness Profile Program 8th and 11th grade survey; Eden School District community initiated psychological counseling (East Aurora, NY, 3/2/2006)
- o 4-H leadership development age 7-19, no differentiation between college bound or not, fosters intergenerational activities (Ballston Spa, 3/23/2006)
- o Success: CCSI – Coordinated Children's Services Initiative (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

Comments at six of the nine Listening Sessions suggest the need to re-examine current means of funding for public schools and youth programs. In this, the overall emphasis was on the need to develop innovative alternatives to the current taxation structure and the current breakdown between state and local school finance resources.

Examine different funding options - detach school funds from local taxes, and place emphasis on state funds to equalize. (Liberty, NY, 1/26/2006)

Re-examine how education is funded across the state – seasonal homeowners and other taxes an issue; Need to address state aid and unfunded mandates (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Explore alternatives to school funding—E.g. Pennsylvania, "head tax"-- money for kids in school (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

How state resources are utilized.; State should pay more of taxes rather than locality (& property tax)   (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

More regional, less centralized (Albany or D.C.) control over funds and allocation (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Need funding for rural areas with small numbers—how to show impact?; Several rural areas could collaborate on one application for a grant—solve the small numbers problem (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

Another overarching category of what is needed, as described by Listening Session participants, can broadly be described as basic infrastructure development. Comments at six of the nine Listening Sessions suggested a need to attract, retain, and train quality teachers and administrators in these rural schools. Within this, at four Listening Sessions, cooperation and consolidation among schools, districts, and other programs emerged as a key component towards the development of an effective rural education system.

Need more training for school board members and others (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

In southern US many states have county level districts – is this successful? (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Cooperation between CU, experiment station, practical applications, and science teachers curriculum development (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Need more cooperation and coordination among groups and agencies; less compartmentalization and competition (Liberty, NY, 1/26/2006)

Better articulation of roles between formal and informal organizations, such as between public schools and 4H (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Infrastructure for telecommunications, distance learning for staff development (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

o "Teach Rural America" program – incentive to attract and retain teachers (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

The need for more research into the dynamics of youth migration and educational patterns was emphasized at fully five of the Listening Sessions. Comments at four of the Listening Sessions further suggested a need to focus attention and research on the specific rural context, and the ways in which urban and rural areas are both similar and different.

Need to study the migration of high school grads (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

Is youth flight just a rite of passage? (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Returning youth seen as asset - opportunity to infuse new ideas and experiences (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Research drop-out rates – compare successful v. unsuccessful programs for prevention – better programs for students at-risk and with special needs-- 5-year students don't enter the statistics (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

Research - tracking rural vs. urban youth on outcomes such as, education, income, occupations, choice of place to live as adults (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Recognition that problems may be universal but may take different shape rural -> suburban -> urban (East Aurora, NY, 3/2/2006)

Increase understanding of urban-rural interface (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Specific rural programming (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

2.3.5 Summary of Findings

After thus reviewing major findings in each of the four categories discussed at the nine regional listening sessions, we can now explore the interconnections and paint a more holistic picture of the vision that emerges. Rather than existing as fragmented entities, the findings in each category (Current Strengths, Current Weaknesses, Desired Outcomes, and What Is Needed) intertwine to produce a comprehensive picture of Rural Schools and Youth. With this in mind, the following summary of findings will draw out the overall themes and interconnections between categories in order to better develop our understanding of New York State's Rural Schools and Youth, as seen by the residents of New York State who participated in the regional Listening Sessions.

Rural schools seem to exist within a favorable climate of strong community support, occupying an integral position as center[s] of the community. Small rural schools and intimate class sizes are described as offering increased opportunities for active participation and helping foster quality connections between teachers and students in these rural areas. Programmatically, BOCES, 4-H, Cooperative Extension, and community colleges are seen as providing positive opportunities for rural youth.

In order to build on these strengths, participants expressed a desire for greater local control and the integration of the local community into the curriculum. Comments reflected a need to expand the curriculum to increase its responsiveness to local needs, as through increased vocational education to meet local employment opportunities and increased education reflective of the local rural culture, as well as to include education for social issues, physical and nutritional health, entrepreneurship, agriculture, and life skills such as financial literacy. There is an overall drive to reduce the centralization of the education system and desire to reduce the "unhealthy" emphasis on standardized testing—current national trends that participants deem mismatched to the unique needs of rural areas.

At the same time, comments suggested an increased need for coordination and collaboration at various levels—not only between school districts, but also counties, community colleges, and public and private youth agencies. Given the recognition that course offerings and extra-curricular activities are generally more limited in scope at small rural schools, the development of these partnerships may expand opportunities and maximize use of limited resources. Although a few comments directly referenced traditional school consolidation as positive, the majority of comments in this area implied a desire for creative methods—such as resource sharing between districts or consolidation at an administrative level— which will enable communities to retain the value of rural schools as local institutions.

Despite the fact that BOCES was consistently identified as a valuable rural institution that serves an important purpose in filling an educational niche and preparing students for the labor force, comments suggest that BOCES and other forms of Career and Technical Education suffer greatly

from a negative stigma. Once students are branded as being on one track or another, RVP participants see little opportunity for movement or exploration between the two. Comments suggest that this polarization between CTE and college-track education is particularly detrimental to rural areas, in which youth who are perceived to be more talented are often trained to be "exported" away from the local community—at the expense of the needs of other students.

In order to enable rural communities to make efficient use of local resources and promote community engagement and workforce development, a number of participant comments suggest a need for a paradigm shift towards local education for local needs. All youth, regardless of which "track" they are on—whether college-bound or not—need exposure to the full range of opportunities and possibilities, as through differentiated education. Guidance counselors must be aware of local employment needs and opportunities, including those in agriculture and the trades. Participants felt that the development of partnerships between schools and local businesses, which may take the form of career awareness programs, internships, mentoring, and job-shadowing, in all fields— including agriculture—would promote youth development and community vitality.

Because, in the words of one Listening Session participant, small rural schools thus "provide a focus and identity for promoting community and economic development" (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005), widespread sentiment exists that they offer strong potential for community engagement. Participants felt that the development of a framework to better encourage school-community collaboration would foster a sense of community

ownership among students. To this end, hands-on activities within the community, in forms such as experiential and service learning, were seen as critical to overcoming alienation and retaining youth in these rural areas.

Comments further suggested that if rural education could instill appreciation for agriculture and nature, then young people would have greater pride in the rural culture and rootedness in local/regional economic opportunities. At the same time, participants felt that, if this education could also ensure that students became globally competitive in their use of technology and telecommunications, then they would be able to succeed in the wider society. In this, across the nine Listening Sessions, participants describe somewhat of an emerging tension between these sets of needs as reflective of themes of old vs. new and local vs. global.

To achieve successful rural youth development, participants implied that schools need to be recognized as more than just a place where youth go to fulfill requirements. Participants felt that, if the role of school was expanded to include an overall emphasis on the physical, intellectual, and emotional health of youth, then rural schools could effectively promote the safety and wellbeing of all students. In order to maximize their outreach and make more efficient use of resources, participants also suggested that youth organizations should work in partnership with rural schools to create more coordinated and comprehensive youth services in response to changing demographics. To this end, needed services and programs in rural areas include counseling, child psychiatry, leadership development, both before- and after-school programs, and youth-built programming.

In order to achieve the true potential of rural education and youth services in promoting the long-term success and well-being of youth in these

communities, participants in the Listening Sessions suggested that funding priorities need to be re-examined and current taxation models reformed. Comments emphasized that, if rural programs could develop new ways to successfully compete for available grants, then funding inequalities could be substantially reduced.   Participants felt that the offering of competitive pay, professional development, and creative incentives for teachers in rural areas would enhance the capacity of rural schools to attract and retain quality teachers and administrators.

Under the current system, participant observations suggested that declining population in their rural areas often results in a lack of resources available for education and youth services, which, in turn, contributes to increased youth out-migration and the loss of further resources. Overall participant comments demonstrated the widespread perception that this negative cycle reflects the relationship between education, youth, and the rural economy: no one factor can be isolated as responsible for the population decline. Participants suggested that a better understanding of the ways in which rural youth specifically make life choices will enable the development of programs that target such needs.

General sentiment implied that future integration of youth, school, and the community will have positive ripple effects throughout the community-- with an overall emphasis on youth retention and local workforce development. "Invest[ment] in children as a future community resource" (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006), through a combination of these various measures, is thus identified by Rural Visioning Participants as a necessary component of rural community development in New York State.

Chapter Three: Rural Visioning Youth Engagement

3.1 Review of Previous Studies

Why do we care what youth think? Why is a youth voice important to the process? In recent years,

> Many community development efforts have come to perceive youth retention as a high priority, and [demonstrate an] understanding that the quality of life for local residents is tied to the ability of the community to maintain a viable base of younger adults (Garasky, 2002, p. 429).

A Kettering Foundation publication further points to the "major" connection between youth development and community development (Harbour, 2008, para. 9).

Several recent studies by the Center for Rural Affairs (CFRA) specifically examined the importance of youth in the creation and maintenance of strong and successful rural communities. The title of the first article makes a bold declaration in its assertion that "Youth are the key to community survival" (CFRA, 2005). According to this study, communities that provide leadership development and opportunities for young people to participate in decision-making will both bolster their success at attracting and retaining youth, and develop effective, quality leadership for the future.

When young people are sufficiently attracted to, and invested in, a community, research suggests that they will find innovative ways to create their own opportunity—to "make it work" (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006; CFRA, 2006). Citing a youth panel at the recent Prairie Action conference in Fargo, North Dakota, the Center for Rural Affairs (CFRA, 2006) suggests

that communities that are good at attracting and keeping young people will create their own economic opportunity. With this in mind, the question becomes how to initially attract and retain young people—how to set this chain in motion. Access to a quality environment, opportunities for entrepreneurship, and a welcoming atmosphere were among the community qualities cited by youth participants in this panel as decisive factors in their decisions to locate.

Despite this apparent link between youth and community survival, another CFRA study (2006) is titled "Young People Most Overlooked Population in Small Town Survival." According to this article, "Every town meeting acknowledges the critical role of youth, but they are often the most overlooked population in the equation of town survival" (para.1). At the same time that the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1996) reports that 86% of youth report wanting to make meaningful contributions to their communities, Benson (1997) reports 20% of youth report feeling valued in their communities (as cited in *Partners for Children*, 2001). With this in mind, there emerges a clear mismatch between the important role of youth in community development and the actual ways in which communities currently approach their development.

Using data from the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Garasky (2002) attempts to pinpoint explanatory factors in the migratory decisions of youth—in essence, what factors most affect a young person's decision to stay in or leave their home community. In accordance with the social capital ideas of Flora and Flora (2003), Garasky's findings indicate that, while the local economy and labor market are indeed important to the relocation decision, it is especially true for rural youth that non-economic

factors are a stronger motivator in the decision to remain in or relocate from the home community. Based on this analysis, a host of non-economic individual, family, and community factors play a critical role in the decision of any given youth to remain in the home community (Garasky, 2002). Several other studies have also demonstrated that family ties, personal ties to peers and unrelated adults in the community, and a sense of commitment to and identification with the community are key determinants of a youth's decision to remain in or return to this home community (Wilson & Peterson, 1988; Crockett, Shanahan, and Jackson-Newsom, 2000).

With this in mind, a young person's decision whether to migrate from, or remain in, a community is actually far more complex than simple economic and employment opportunities. Literature further suggests that the life satisfaction of low-income, rural youth is more strongly influenced by personal meanings and self-perceptions shaped within their particular cultural context, rather than by more traditional objective measures of income and status attainment (Wilson, Henry, & Peterson, 1997; Wilson & Peterson, 1988; Seal & Harmon, 1995). With this in mind, the cultural context becomes of primary importance in the drive for policy that effectively targets this population. From a community standpoint, this suggests a need to look beyond simple economic development in the design of programs and policy to promote youth retention and community development in rural areas.

In order to truly promote youth ownership in the community, numerous studies suggest the need to give youth a voice in the decision-making process. As an example of the practical applications of this process, while it may at first be tempting to dismiss youth comments about the need

for more amenities and recreational opportunities as mere trivialities—things that, while important to youth, remain unimportant to the ultimate goal of long-term community vitality—the importance of such amenities to community survival is, in actuality, documented in academic literature. According to the Center for Rural Affairs (Hassebrook, 2003), "Communities that invest in themselves—in quality schools, swimming pools, recreation, etc.—can better keep and attract the young families that energize communities and create new business" (p. 2).

To accomplish this, the Center for Rural Affairs instructs communities to "First—ask [youth] what they think, and listen to what they say…We will have to be willing to give them the influence to help them create the kind of communities in which they want to live and raise families" (CFRA, 2005, para. 8). Logically, any such process must begin by finding out what youth currently perceive as strengths and weaknesses of their rural communities. It is within this context that the Youth Rural Visioning Project is situated.

3.2 Overview

As Listening Session participants emphasized, since today's youth make up the future of any community, then any truly effective attempt at creating a vision for the future should include youth input as well. In the words of one Listening Session participant, there is need for "more involvement of young people [in initiatives such as the RVP] because this is about their future!" To borrow a phrase used by former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcraft, in essence, "Youth are 25% of the population, but

100% of the future." Framing this idea bluntly, how can we hope to combat youth alienation if we do not listen to what youth have to say?

If it is truly important to foster a sense of community ownership and investment among youth at an early age in order to achieve long-term community viability, as is suggested by RVP Listening Session participants and the various references cited above, then it is natural to begin this process with the community visioning itself. The Youth Engagement portion of the Rural Visioning Process was thus situated within this larger context of youth-community engagement and its documented relation to community viability.

Although the Rural Visioning Project collected thoughts and perceptions on the topic of "Rural Schools and Youth," as detailed in Section I of this report, the question remains of how these perceptions jive with what these youth themselves perceive: how young people in these rural communities see themselves and their communities—now and in the future. Given the multigenerational focus of the vision set forth for the state of rural New York, and the idea that sustainable communities require active citizens both young and old, the Youth Engagement portion of the RVP represents one step in the drive towards community engagement at an early age.

With this in mind, the youth engagement aspects of the Rural Visioning Project evolved directly out of a need identified by community members. The Youth Engagement segment of the RVP represents an attempt to bridge the three-pronged gap previously identified as problematic: bringing a youth voice to the community development dialogue is the first

step towards engaging youth with issues of the community, with adults in the community, and with policymakers.

In keeping with this theme, and given the concern expressed by many RVP participants that a youth voice was noticeably lacking from the Listening Session phases of the project, several targeted attempts were made to directly obtain the input of youth throughout rural New York. The Youth Engagement aspects of the Rural Visioning Project data collection occurred in two major phases: 1) a Rural Youth Visioning workshop conducted at the 4-H State Action Representative Retreat (STARR) conference, which obtained input from approximately 25 youth, and 2) a Youth Survey that was posted online at the Rural Visioning Project website, publicized through several educator and youth organizations, and had elicited about 118 responses as of July 2006.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

3.3.1 Youth Visioning Session

This Youth Visioning session occurred as a workshop offered at the 4-H State Teen Action Representatives Retreat (STARR) on April 22, 2006 at the State Fairgrounds in Syracuse. This weekend retreat was attended by approximately 130 4-H youth ages 13-19 from across New York State.

In addition to other structured activities, youth had the opportunity to choose two out of nine workshops in which to participate. In addition to the Rural Youth Visioning, a sample of other workshop options included "Produced in New York," "Making Sense of Youth Community Action,"

and "Community Unity: Teens Open 4-H Doors to Diversity." In addition, some other workshops focused on more specific tools and skills, such as use of GPS, radio and media writing, and grant writing.

Before the conference, STARR participants received short blurbs about each of the workshops. The Rural Youth Visioning was billed in this way:

What does your community look like? Can't wait to finish your education and get out of town? Are you thinking that your future doesn't include returning to where you grew up? Why? What's happening that makes you want to get out? Participants in this workshop will take a closer look at their communities, identify issues, and consider ways to have their voices heard as part of the NYS Rural Visioning Project. Adults have already begun to discuss these very issues. Don't you think it's about time they hear from YOUth?

Actual workshop sign-ups took place right before the workshops began and were first-come, first-serve. In order to make sure that participants were evenly distributed between the various workshops, sign-ups for each were limited. Because of this, youth interest in the visioning and community development process cannot necessarily be determined based on the number of participants alone.

The "Youth Rural Visioning" workshop occurred in two sessions, each one-hour long, and attracted a total of about 25 youth from a variety of counties across New York State. As depicted in Table 3.1, the group of youth in each session, for the most part, represented a mixture of different counties and ages.

Table 3.1: Approximation of counties represented at the Rural Youth Visioning workshops, based on initial sign-up sheets.

Session 1
Cayuga County
Washington County
Franklin County[3]
Rensselaer County
Chautauqua County

Session 2
Cortland County
Tompkins County
Ontario County
Seneca County
Madison County
Niagara County
Livingston County

Since youth are usually not familiar with formal theories of community development, the overall theme of the workshop centered on getting youth excited about the possibility and importance of community visioning—and the idea that youth really do have the power to make positive change in their communities through this process.

In order to get youth thinking about ideas of community, the workshop opened with a fun activity designed to demonstrate some basic community principles. Each student was assigned a role as a diverse member of a community (for example, fire fighter, mayor, grocery store owner, student, dump truck driver, school teacher, doctor, etc.) We asked them to gather around a tarp, and explained that the goal was to flap the tarp around in such a way as to keep the beach balls in the center from flying out. After a

---

[3] The majority of participants in Session 1 were from Franklin County (approximately 10), a factor which might influence the results

few minutes, we began pulling participants away from the tarp—representing the loss/ out-migration of community members. Obviously, with fewer and fewer "community members" left in the circle, those who remained found that they had to work harder and harder to keep the community from falling apart—to keep the beach balls from bouncing out of the center of the circle.

As the main data collection aspect of this workshop, youth were given about 10 minutes to do a "rapid fire" brainstorming of issues that are important to them within their own specific communities. Branching off slightly from the main Rural Visioning Project, we focused our attention on the theme areas of education, environment and land use, community and economic development, and safety. These are concrete themes that youth experience and deal with on a daily basis in their communities, and are also broad enough to serve as umbrellas for many different sub-issues. Within each theme, workshop participants were asked to provide insight into their "Likes," "Dislikes," and "New Ideas."

In order to encourage more creative and active participation from the youth, we organized this data collection as a hands-on activity in which youth brainstormed their ideas on post-it notes in each of these categories and then actively moved around to stick them on newsprint labeled with the appropriate theme heading. In this way, we hoped to encourage youth who might not feel comfortable enough to speak up during a discussion to share their ideas. We also hoped that this would open the session up for more creative visioning, since there would be no fear of being judged for right or wrong answers.

During the Youth Rural Visioning Session, one participant raised a valid concern when she stated that, from her experience, while the 4-H teens in the room were likely to be engaged and interested in this type of activity, other teens do not really seem to care. To briefly paraphrase her comments, when you try to have these conversations with others, they act like you are "crazy." She pointed out that, from her own personal experience, many youth would rather play video games and watch TV than talk about community issues. For this reason, she questioned how it is realistically possible to take these visioning lessons home to the larger, more apathetic community.

To address these concerns, the workshop emphasized that many of the same challenges are encountered in working with adults—it is not just youth who can be apathetic to these issues. Because Visioning is a flexible process designed with local community needs in mind, however, by definition, it retains strong potential to be engaging and attractive to a variety of community members. In order to bring a diversity of youth to the table, these comments and experiences suggest that community visioning must be framed from a creative, fun, and empowering standpoint—with youth involved in its design. Regardless, such concerns would need to be addressed in any sort of Visioning Process—whether youth or adult—if one hopes to achieve a representative sample of the community.

The overall response to this limited visioning session was overwhelmingly positive. In filling out post-conference evaluation forms, the majority of youth who had the opportunity to participate in this Rural Youth Visioning workshop consistently listed it as their favorite workshop at

STARR, suggesting a need for further such opportunities for youth to voice their observations and concerns about life in their communities.

3.3.2 Online Youth Rural Visioning Survey

In order to reach a more diverse and perhaps representative youth audience, a visioning survey specifically for youth was created for access online. Designed in conjunction with the New York State 4-H Office, this survey was designed to be confidential and anonymous. In accordance with the University Committee on Human Subjects regulations, only after reading through the full terms of the survey and the rights of participants, could youth push the "consent button" and proceed to the actual survey. Youth were provided with appropriate contact information should they have any questions or concerns about their participation.

Paralleling the themes from the Listening Sessions, questions were designed to draw out youth perceptions on the current strengths and weaknesses of their communities, the desired future, and examples of successful programs or strategies from their communities. The survey included both ratings questions that asked youth to rate the importance of certain issues on a scale from "extremely" important to "not at all" important, and open-ended questions that allowed youth to express their own interpretations. In addition, in order to gauge youth interest in the visioning and community development processes, they were asked whether they would be interested in actively participating in future processes of community engagement. The complete list of survey questions is presented in Appendix B.

In order to promote the survey, the following write-up was sent out on the Cornell Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Educator listserv, with the idea that these youth development professionals could then pass it along to others they felt might be interested:

As someone who works with youth in New York State, we need your help in spreading the word about a new initiative called the Rural Visioning Project. Hopefully you have already heard about this project, or participated in one of the Listening Sessions held throughout rural New York.

Sponsored through Cornell's Community & Rural Development Institute (CaRDI), the Department of Development Sociology's Rural New York Initiative (RNYI), Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources, this project focuses on collecting citizen input in order to influence policy for the future of rural New York State.

Up until this point, however, the project has been largely missing a youth voice. In response to this, a new youth web survey will allow young people from all across New York State to make their voices heard as part of this initiative.

Participation is voluntary and anonymous, but will encourage youth to share with us what they like and don't like about their communities, what they would like to change in the future, and any suggestions they have for how to make their communities better. Attached is a short blurb about the project and the survey that you can choose to pass along to youth in your community.

And, if you have not heard about or participated in the first stages of the Rural Visioning Project, we encourage you (and everyone else you know) to take

five minutes and fill out the adult version of the visioning survey online. Tell us what is important to you!

All information about the project, as well as information and links to both the adult and youth surveys is found online at: www.rnyi.cornell.edu. Click on Rural Visioning Project, and then follow the links on the left of the page to find what you are looking for.

For the benefit of these youth development professionals, also included with this email was a slightly different write-up about the youth survey that was designed to pique youth interest in participating in the project. In order to make the process as simple as possible, educators were encouraged to directly pass this blurb along to youth within their network or adapt it to fit their needs.

What does your community look like? Can't wait to finish your education and get out of town? Are you thinking that your future doesn't include returning to where you grew up? Why? What's happening that makes you want to get out?

We're looking for young people interested in telling us about what's happening in their community. Won't you please take a few minutes to complete this survey so that we have a better idea of what youth consider important when it comes to community? We want to know what you like, what you don't like, and what programs and services you want to see in your community. With your input, the information collected will be used to help make your community a better place to live, work, and enjoy.

This survey is all about having your voice heard as a young person living in rural New York! Adults have already begun to discuss these very issues. Don't you think it's about time they hear from YOUth?

To take the youth survey and make your voice heard, for more information on what the Rural Visioning Project is about, and to see what other youth who participated in a visioning session at the 4-H STARR conference said about their communities, please go to: http://hosts.cce.cornell.edu/rnyi/ *… and follow the links on the left of the page!*

Many of the professionals who received this email responded with notice that they had passed it along to others within their network that they felt would be interested (i.e. school teachers and administrators and leaders of other youth organizations). Unfortunately, although much interest was expressed in participating in the visioning as part of a civics curriculum, the timing for this was simply not feasible based on the late release of the survey. Feedback indicated that in order for this project to be practical for use in a school, it would have had to have been made available much earlier in the school year, as early as January. Despite this, at least one school class was able to make use of the survey. Actual participation in the Rural Youth Online Survey is listed by county in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Participants in the Rural Youth Visioning Online Survey, By County

Response County	Count	Percent
Allegany	2	1.7
Broome	1	0.8
Cattaraugus	1	0.8
Chautauqua	1	0.8

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Chemung	2	1.7
Chenango	1	0.8
Cortland	1	0.8
Dutchess	1	0.8
Franklin	1	0.8
Fulton	3	2.5
Genesee	12	10.2
Jefferson	1	0.8
Lewis	33	28.0
Livingston	2	1.7
Madison	2	1.7
Montgomery	26	22
Onondaga	1	0.8
Ontario	2	1.7
Orleans	1	0.8
Oswego	1	0.8
Otsego	1	0.8
St. Lawrence	1	0.8
Saratoga	1	0.8
Seneca	2	1.7
Sullivan	2	1.7
Tioga	1	0.8
Tompkins	6	5.1
Warren	1	0.8
Wayne	4	3.4
Wyoming	4	3.4
Total	118	100

As of July 2006, 118 youth responses to the survey had been filed online, with county participation of thirty out of fifty-seven counties statewide (not including the five boroughs of New York City).

3.4 Limitations

Overall, the Rural Youth Visioning Project was not a main component of the New York State Rural Visioning Project. In fact, the idea to bring a youth voice to the table emerged only after some concern was expressed at the *lack* of youth voice. The specific means by which youth were engaged evolved in direct response to my ties with the NYS 4-H Office, independent of the Rural Visioning Project. In this sense, the inclusion of youth voice in the overall Rural Visioning Project can be thought of as an afterthought, or even perhaps best be thought of as a separate project entirely.

While not intending to trivialize the results obtained through this Rural Youth Visioning, it is important to realize that, with so much energy and effort going into the NYS Rural Visioning Project, a minimal amount of resources was devoted to this youth project. The resulting project thus seemed to emerge as something of a token project—perhaps more symbolic of the need to include a youth voice in the project than actually contributing information that was viewed as central to the overall Rural Visioning Project as a whole.

Within this context, several major limitations potentially impacted the findings. Echoing themes from the Rural Visioning Project as discussed in Section I, perhaps the most salient limitation again relates to just who was, and who was not, present for this data collection process. By its very nature, the participants at the Youth Rural Visioning Workshop at the 4-H conference were all participants in the 4-H organization. Similarly, the online youth survey also may have inadvertently exhibited a bias towards 4-H

youth. Although the survey was meant to be more accessible, with the goal of collecting a potentially more diverse sample of youth voice, the fact that it was promoted through the 4-H educator email list likely predisposed it for use by the 4-H organization. Had more time and resources been invested in the youth aspect of the RVP, a more diverse and inclusive sampling of youth perspective could perhaps have been obtained by marketing the survey through a wider range of youth service organizations, including public schools, YMCAs, church groups, libraries, etc.

After considering these potential biases in data collection, the question arises of whether these 4-H youth—from whose perspective the bulk of data for this Youth Rural Visioning Project was obtained—are representative of the majority of youth in these rural communities. Reflecting back upon the concern expressed by the workshop participant who felt that other teens are less likely to care about such community issues than are members of her 4-H cohort leads one to wonder whether youth who participate in such and youth who do not participate might have different perspectives about their communities. In fact, research compiled by the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), formerly the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, supports the notion that youth who participate in 4-H do indeed express more of a desire to make a difference in their communities and increased motivation to help others (NIFA, 2009). With this in mind, engagement with all youth in a community becomes even more critical if one hopes to obtain a balanced perspective-- one that is reflective of youth who may not already be actively engaged with such community issues. Without a question on the survey to gauge whether the survey-taker was participating through 4-H, however,

there remains no way of ascertaining just how much this bias actually colored who took part in the survey.

A quick glance at the breakdown of county participation in the online survey, as presented in Table 3.1, immediately suggests which counties were represented as part of a larger, organized group effort, as opposed to more random, individual youth filling out the survey. Lewis County, with 33 youth participating in the online survey, and Montgomery County, with 26 youth participating in the online survey, together account for almost half of the total survey participation. With most other counties represented by one or two respondents, it is therefore possible that results from these two counties could have a disproportionate influence on the overall findings. A hot issue or current event in one of these two counties (for example, the new Wal-Mart that opened in Lewis County in 2006, around the time of this survey), could thus have substantially colored the results– even if this same general issue was not mentioned by a single survey-taker outside of this one county.

Furthermore, by nature of the way in which the Youth Visioning Workshop was structured, with each individual participant writing his/her personal comments on a Post-It, youth were not engaged in substantial dialogue about the issues. With this in mind, to a certain extent, the data thus represent incomplete or fragmented thoughts– it is difficult to put statements into context or gain a sense of perspective from the participants. Because of this limitation, we were unable to truly uncover any sort of reasons, explanations, or justifications for why youth feel the way they do based on what they see occurring in their specific communities. The opportunity to discuss and piggy-back from the statements of other participants certainly would have made the visioning more engaging and

might even have resulted in the generation of some new ideas by the participants as they were exposed to new viewpoints and able to debate hot topics.

With no opportunity for youth to interact with one another around these issues during the session, there remains no way to know which comments represent isolated opinions and which concerns are more commonly shared. Along this vein, contradictory statements (to continue with our previous example, Wal-Mart listed under both the headings "What's great about your community" and "What's not so great about your community"—clearly opposing statements) could reflect either isolated individual differences of perception or larger underlying divisions.

As reflective of this limitation, one participant in the 4-H STARR Conference Visioning Session mentioned that she did not see the point in writing down all of her ideas since some of them were similar to ideas that had already been listed. How many other participants did not feel the need to write down their thoughts on any given issue, after having seen them already represented once on the board? In retrospect, as facilitators, we should have made it clear that all ideas-- no matter how repetitive they may have seemed-- were valuable to the purpose of this visioning process, with the goal of measuring which issues are important to the greatest percent of youth.

Similarly, although the online survey attempted to be as thorough as possible, asking specific questions in order to probe into the details of what youth see occurring in their rural communities and how they feel about this, it remains just that—a survey. By nature, a survey is not an interactive process, but, rather a static snapshot in time. There is no way to ask targeted

84

follow-up questions or delve deeper into the issues raised, no way to clarify points that may be unclear, or elaborate on certain themes that emerge. Although many survey questions were designed to be open-ended, one word responses were common, and, in reading through these answers, the interpreter lacks any recourse for further explanation and therefore is left to interpret on the basis of incomplete information.

In order to provide some context from which to examine the findings, in the future, it may be useful to include some basic questions asking how the participant heard about the survey, whether they were participating as an individual or as part of a larger group, and why they chose to participate. Some youth likely participated in the survey because they "had to" as part of a class, whereas other youth likely participated in the survey because they honestly hoped to influence the direction of their community. While all honest responses certainly have an equal value regardless of how the respondent came to participate in the survey, it is also likely that whether participation was forced or voluntary could have had an effect on the seriousness of the response.

Judging from the open-ended responses, it is clear that some youth took the project more seriously than others, and that a few of the comments were likely made in jest—such as the youth who stated that what is not great about his community is the lack of "hot girls." Knowledge of this particular youth's motivation for participating in the survey, for example, would enable us to better infer whether this youth was simply trying to use humor to make the best out of being forced to participate in this survey against his will—or if, as a rural youth, he honestly feels that this perceived dearth of attractive females is the worst thing about his rural community. Similarly, when asked

to describe what is great about their community, several youth responded by saying "nothing." The question then becomes whether these youth truly feel that absolutely "nothing" actually is great about their communities…or whether this was simply the easiest answer to avoid actual participation in a survey in which they did not really want to be participating in the first place.

With these limitations in mind, the data obtained from this Youth Visioning Session and online youth survey can perhaps best be used as a starting point from which to begin analyzing and tackling issues of youth and community. In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of just what rural youth see occurring in their New York State communities and what these youth desire for the future, however, it would be beneficial to conduct more thorough data-collection, perhaps modeled after the New York State Rural Visioning Project's regional listening session format.

3.5 Findings

For the purpose of this report, the findings from the overall Youth Visioning are divided into three sections: Section 3.5.1 covers the issue identification portion of the youth survey, Section 3.5.2 details what youth have to say about their communities in general, and Section 3.5.3 focuses more specifically on the topic of Rural Schools. With the exception of Section A, which reflects the only quantitative portion of the Youth Visioning process, the bulk of the findings section revolves directly around youth comments from both the workshop and the survey. Each major theme includes a sampling of relevant comments.

In interpreting these findings, it is important to note that, in general, no distinction is made between information obtained from the online survey and information obtained from the in-person 4-H workshop. Despite the fact that these two methods of data collection were very different in process, for purposes of this report, the results have been synthesized into one comprehensive findings section.

From these two different youth engagement efforts emerges a picture for not only rural schools and youth, but, more broadly, for community development as a whole. Youth have a lot to say about the development of their communities. Issues identified included both local and global, ranging from the smell associated with the local cheese-plant all the way up to the problems of trading with countries that lack child labor laws.

Rather than simply focusing on what these rural youth have to say about the topic of Rural Schools and Youth—our focus from the Rural Visioning Project described in Section I of this report—this comprehensive focus allows for a more thorough examination of rural youth. These findings, as developed through the actual experiences and voices of rural youth, thus provide valuable insight into the overall theme of "Rural Youth" in general.

As the future of their communities, youth bring a unique perspective to the table. Contrary to the perception that youth are unaware or disinterested in their communities, and lacking a sense of community pride, many comments from both the 4-H workshop and the web survey suggest that youth are highly in tune with what they see happening in their communities—both positive and negative—and eager for a chance to speak on these issues.

3.5.1 Issue Identification (from Youth Visioning Survey only)

The first section of the youth survey was the only part of the Youth Visioning that was not open-ended; rather this section asked youth to rate a total of nineteen issues and topics on a scale from "extremely important" to "not at all important," making these results conducive to quantitative analysis. In order to succinctly present these findings, Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 provide graphical representations of the issues at both ends of the spectrum—those most frequently identified as highly important and those most frequently identified as not important.

As depicted in Figure 3.1, Education, Schools and Youth, Health Care, and Employment emerged as the most frequently identified issues in this category—with more than three quarters of participants categorizing each of these issues as such. On the other hand, Figure 3.2 reveals that People Leaving the State, Immigration, and Threat of Terrorism are the issues most frequently identified as unimportant—even though each of these topics was identified as unimportant by fewer than half of the survey-takers. Overall, more participants classified issues as highly important (80.4-27.7%) than classified issues as unimportant (45.4-3.00%)--suggesting that most of these community issues are considered by youth to be at least moderately important.
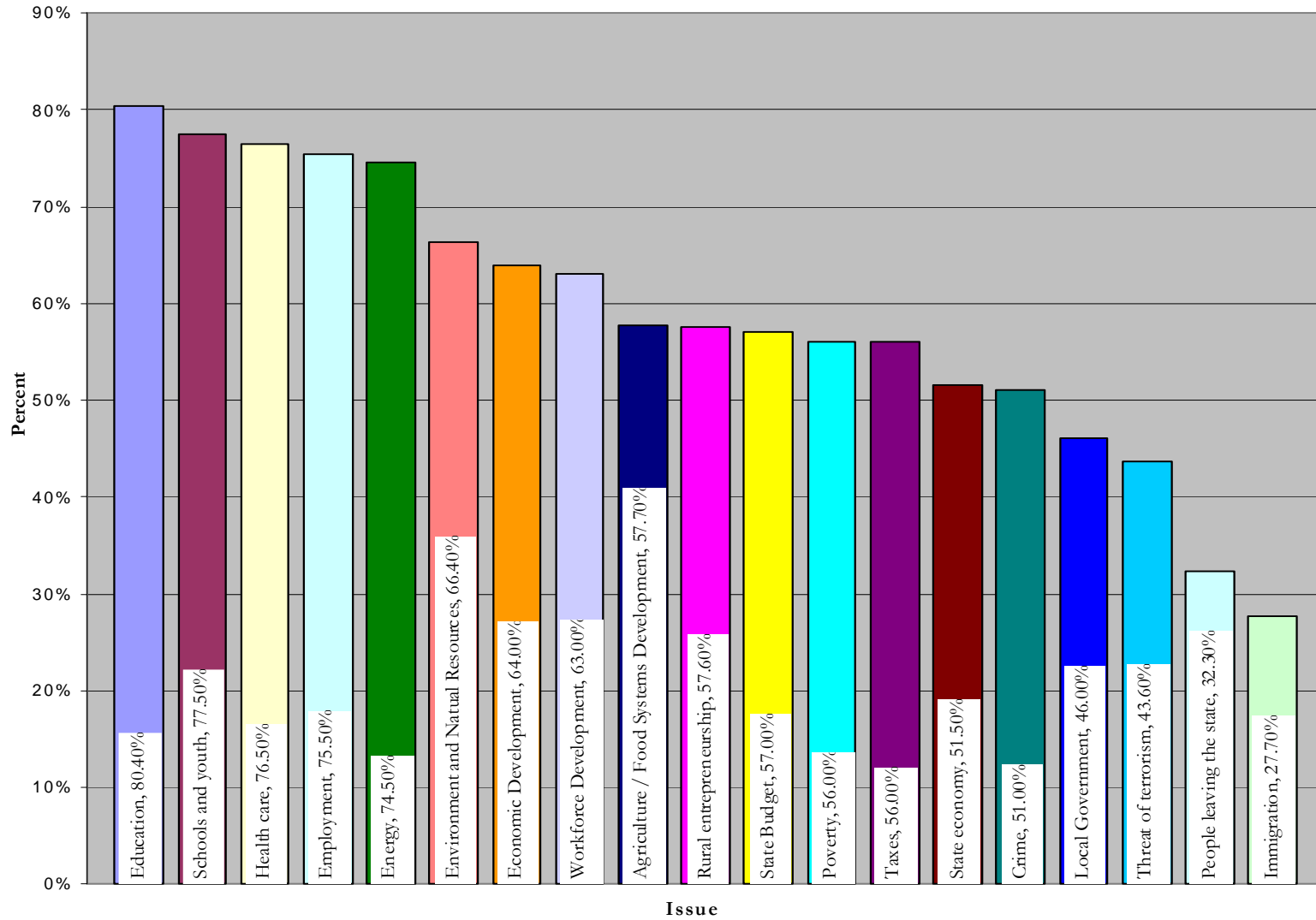
Figure 3.1: "Extremely" and "Very" Important Issues Identified by Rural Youth Visioning Survey Participants, as of 6/30/2006
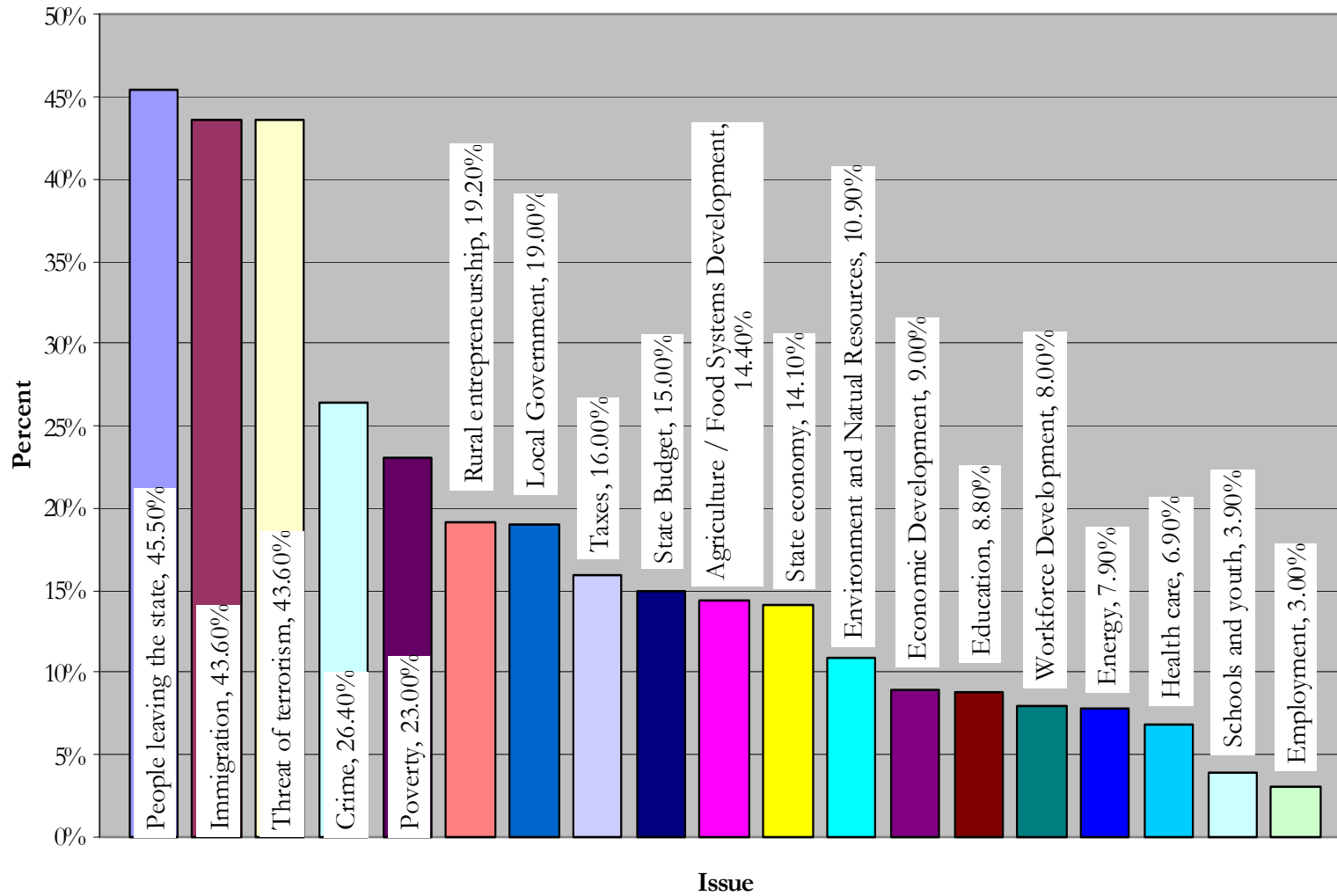
Figure 3.2: "Not Very" and "Not At All" Important Issues Identified by Youth Rural Visioning Survey Participants, as of 6/30/2006

Of the total of nineteen issues included in the survey, fifteen issues were classified as "Extremely" and "Very" important by the majority of survey-takers (greater than 50% of participants). Only Local Government, Threat of Terrorism, People Leaving the State, and Immigration were considered by fewer than half of the survey participants to be of a high degree of importance.

Of the nineteen issues included in the survey, none of the issues were identified by the majority of survey-takers (greater than 50% of the participants) as "Not Very" and "Not At All" important. Not surprisingly, issues *least* frequently identified as *un*important correspond to the issues most frequently identified as "Extremely" and "Very" important: Employment, Schools and Youth, and Heath Care.

In comparing these two graphs, it is interesting and rather perplexing to note that, although the topics of "Education" and "Schools and Youth" were the two most frequently cited as highly important, these same issues were **not** the least frequently cited as unimportant. In fact, while fewer than 4% of survey participants classified "Schools and Youth" as "Not very" and "Not at all" important, more than double that percentage classified "Education" as such (8.8%). Since no definitions of the categories were provided with the survey, there remains no way of knowing how the category of "Education" was interpreted differently from the category of "Schools and Youth" in explaining this discrepancy.

3.5.2 Community Issue Findings

3.5.2-1 Current strengths: What's great about your community?

The Youth Survey results suggest that youth have a strong sense of social and natural capital in their communities. Comments suggest that youth value the fact that their small communities have close knit social networks, in which everyone knows, and helps, everyone else. In general, youth perceive that people within their rural communities care about one another and are friendly, which leads to a positive feeling of community.

> We are close, everyone knows everyone else
>
> I know everyone that lives in my community and we all care for each other.
>
> The small-town feel. Everyone knows everyone and works together as a team.
>
> It is small and everybody knows everybody.
>
> My community is great because it is small and every one knows everyone
>
> It's small. It's calm and people get along
>
> My community is very small so it is pretty close knit. This is very evident at funerals where nearly the entire community is present and the town pizzeria where you can't go in and not know at least one person eating/working. I'd never be able to live in a large town where you didn't recognize the person walking down the sidewalk and couldn't name nearly everyone in your grade at school

It's small, beautiful (when it's taken care of), and people care
because we know each other.

People care for and help each other

People helping to clean up garbage

What is great about my community is that most people care about
things and are very nice. For example, when a family member dies,
people step up and help you. They lend you some money and cook
you some homemade meals. This shows that people care.

All the friendly neighbors.

People planting trees

I love the small town environment of Genesee County. It's nice to
be able to have good relationships with your neighbors, know
everyone you went to school with, and walk/bike to all your
friends' houses if you want to.

Small town, friendly atmosphere

Everyone cares, there's nothing phony.

Help is there if you need it

The small-town feel extends past social relationships to include
various other aspects of how youth describe life in a rural community.
Communities were frequently described as "quiet," and youth voice
appreciation for feeling safe in their rural communities as the result of low
crime rates.

Its small and easy to get around

I do not want to live in a place where people are being kidnapped
and things are being stolen etc. That is what is great about my

community. There has never really been anything big like that in
my community that I know of.

There isn't a lot of crime which is a good thing

I have wonderful friends and we can go out at night and have a lot
of fun! And be safe with out being kidnapped or something.

It is safe

Quiet; Not a lot of bad things happen

Everything is walking distance

It's nice to be able to walk/bike to all your friends' houses if you
want to

Youth identify school and community spirit as important positive
aspects of their rural areas. Youth describe that, although their communities
may be small, they have the opportunity to participate in many different
activities—both in and out of school. While everything may not be "the
best," as described by one survey-taker, a variety of services and programs
are at least available. To this end, participants shared that:

There is a fair amount of school spirit and everyone supports the
sports teams.

It's a community.

We have good schools

People in my community are involved and want to make a
difference.

We may not offer the best of everything but we offer everything

What's great about my community is the youth activities that take
place.

How there is so many different activities for children!

We have the opportunity to join numerous clubs and programs, such as 4H.

Innovative ideas in the classroom

JUMP Day is a community service day where Middle Schoolers help clean up the community. They also help older people who cannot do yard work or other household projects.

Teens getting involved in sports and activities

School spirit-- it brings the community together by watching the kids do sports or play in the band. It's a community spirit because they share something in common.

A "hang out" place in a church in my town gives kids a save, supervised place to go with friends after school and has really changed lives of kids in my community.

Skate Park kept kids off community property like the court house and gave them a place to go where they wouldn't get in trouble with the police. Open microphone night run by the school that lets bands and/or people perform their talents on stage for people to watch. This was a free event and refreshments were sold. This kept kids off the street and in a safe environment.

Youth appreciate the rural nature of their small and mid-sized communities, citing the presence of farms, fields and open space, and beautiful scenery as things they like about their communities. Youth describe the natural and working environment as a key defining component of their rural communities.

My community is very agricultural therefore it is very open and
pleasant to look at and live in

The great thing about our community is the space we have!

Its clean, there is fresh air

Lots of nature to view and explore through

Protecting beautiful land for everyone

Lots of scenery. Also lots of agriculture

I live in a nice quiet environment. My home is near the mountain
here and surrounded by trees.

My community is in a beautiful environment

We have good places to farm

There are still a lot of open spaces, family farms, and fields. I
think that preserving family owned farms is very important to our
area. Also the area is not developed or built up, so it is still a rural
area.

The great thing about my community is the fields and the working
places. I hope that this community will stay this way.

My community is great because we have a lot of agriculture in our
town

More cows than people

Responses suggest that youth value rural places and traditional
activities that bring community members together, such as county fairs,
festivals, and parks. At the same time, youth value the convenience of having
shopping centers nearby and being close to hubs of activity.

96

My community is great because we have a fair that comes every

year and a great park

Savannah has the Potato Fest every year where it brings in new

faces all the time. Savannah also has the Horse Arena where many

people come to see the horses.

Rural and we have many festivals right here like Pioneer Days and

Harley Happenings, which draw in many people out of town

Concerts, art shows, community celebrations

We have parks for the children to play on

Convenience of having stores close

We have Walmart and a fair

There are a lot of stores and I like to shop

We have good stores

Agriculture and the presence of open space, small population size and
overall community cohesiveness, and opportunities for involvement in youth
activities thus make up a large part of what youth identify as strengths in
their rural communities. Overall sentiment seems to be, as one survey
respondent stated, that youth value "the ability to have rural areas and to
[also] have a lot of stuff to do." In other words, youth express an
appreciation for having the best of both worlds.

3.5.2-2 Current weaknesses: What's not so great about your community?

At the same time that they extol the virtues of their small towns,
youth suggest that the small nature of these rural communities can

97

sometimes seem "too small" when everyone always thinks they know everyone else's business. Despite this smallness, youth describe a problematic lack of interaction between community members and an overall lack of general community involvement. Youth frequently see problematic social cliques forming in their communities, often on the basis of socioeconomic and racial disparities.

> Everyone knows everyone else's business (a.k.a. almost too small)
>
> It is small and everybody knows or thinks they know everybody's business
>
> Not much interaction between community members
>
> We need to come together and help each other more
>
> Apathy
>
> Separation and minor discrimination between races
>
> There are many cliques often split by family money
>
> There is no community involvement. It is like no one cares
>
> No ones willing to help make Savannah a better place. The youth won't go out and help keep the baseball fields looking nice. They leave it up to some else.

Youth frequently identified increases in commercial and housing development as negative. The loss of fields, wetlands, forests, and farmland to development particularly trouble youth in these rural communities. Many participants seem to share the general feeling that valued open space is being replaced with, in the words of one participant, "too much pavement." Youth further express dislike of the type of commercial development that they see occurring, with an emphasis on what these youth see as negative changes

taking place in their rural communities.

> Too many farms becoming housing developments
>
> Businesses and residents building on what was farmland
>
> Fields and wetlands being changed to housing developments
>
> Too much pavement
>
> Big businesses running small ones out
>
> Too many fast-food restaurants
>
> Local business being driven out by large corporations
>
> Too many buildings
>
> I hate seeing our old community being destroyed by modern
>
> building being built in what used to be farmland
>
> The decline of rural areas and emphasis taken away from farming.

At the same time, however, some comments also suggest a certain amount of discontent at the isolation of their rural communities. These youth appear somewhat frustrated that the rural nature of their communities sometimes necessitates driving a great distance to reach certain amenities.

> One thing that isn't so great about our community is that we have
>
> to drive a long ways to get to the mall
>
> Having to drive all the way to Watertown to play soccer indoors
>
> My community doesn't have many stores
>
> We're far from hospitals, shopping, food delivery, colleges
>
> There are not any community pools and not enough stores for
>
> clothes

Within their communities, youth see high rates of poverty compounded by the lack of job opportunity. Survey results reflect a strong perception among youth that their rural areas lack quality job opportunities —whether this is expressed as a total lack of jobs or a lack of jobs that pay beyond the minimum wage.

> Adults having a hard time finding jobs
>
> People are getting into poverty because people cannot afford what they need.
>
> No jobs
>
> There are some families out there that are poor and can't buy things
>
> The school system, poverty level, the many people on welfare, the unemployed, I could go on but I won't
>
> There are a lot of lower class people struggling to make a living
>
> Too many jobs that pay only the minimum wage
>
> Not a lot of local semi-high paying jobs

While, as previously described, youth value the rural nature of their communities, they also express negative feelings and frustration at the lack of opportunities for youth. Jobs and other opportunities for teens are described as limited. Currently, there are not enough activities that target older kids, such as teens and adolescents. The lack of recreation and constructive opportunities for youth results in the frequent perception that there is "nothing to do" in rural communities and makes it seem like no one cares.

Nothing really here. Not many opportunities for a really good education or jobs.

Not enough job opportunities for youth under 18

Youth have limited choices

There's no places to get jobs. There is nothing to do to keep the youth busy, especially during the summer.

Not much to do for kids to keep busy after school and on weekends

There is nothing to do

There's too many food places. There should be a place where kids could play (skating rink, etc)

There aren't enough safe places for older kids (10- 13) to just hang out at

There are no Youth Center facilities in our community for all adolescents to hang out in instead of being out on the streets getting into trouble and fights breaking out everyday.

My community is not so good because there is not a lot of recreation going on. We need more playgrounds in our community. We need a playground with a local swimming area. So that anyone of any age can come and play on the playground or go swimming.

People sit around on the streets like they have nothing to do

Comments imply that such boredom sometimes leads to problems with drugs, alcohol, and vandalism—among both youth and adults. Youth participants are aware of drug and alcohol problems in their communities,

and witness these having a direct negative impact on the community. Although it was not emphasized in the written comments, the discussion portion of the Youth Visioning workshop brought out that youth experience drunk driving as an all-too-common problem in their communities.

> There are some kids around that vandalize buildings, like the historical theatre has again been broken into
>
> Huge drug and alcohol problem in kids and adults.
>
> All the bars and drunks
>
> Accidents from weather and drinking.
>
> Underage alcohol consumption, drug use
>
> There are druggies and poor people in ally ways downtown

In addition, youth describe the physical infrastructure of their communities as run-down and unkempt, further contributing to the perception that no one really cares. Youth describe their communities as plagued by problems of littering and pollution, which detracts from the beauty of the rural environment. The following comments suggest this depressed state:

> Don't take good care of parks
>
> Old buildings not in use
>
> People throwing anything and everything on the ground or anywhere else they want
>
> Pollution in the river
>
> Roadside garbage
>
> It's not clean
>
> A lot of people live in terrible neighborhoods

The trashy houses and the dirty streets

It's dirty

The air and water pollution, the littering

3.5.2-3 Desired future

Youth envision a future of clean, well-kept, and revitalized rural communities with plenty of opportunities for youth. In this desired future, there is a strong sense of community and both the natural and built environments are well cared for.

Fresh and clean. Places for kids to go so they can grow and mature. Not having to worry about drugs or bullies

I would hope to see a safe place for my kids to grow up if they were young

Cleaner road-sides, air and water

More teachers and programs in the school, more programs for kids during the summer

The old buildings fixed up

More community involvement and beautification

Open store fronts, people walking around, activities park for kids

I would like to see more options of stores, no garbage laying around, colorful places, and no crimes

Buildings repainted

More community events

I would like to see more options of stores, no garbage laying around, colorful places, and no crimes

Clean community with nice, well kept housing.

I would like to see Savannah a brighter place. More youth participating in different activities and helping others keep Savannah a nice town.

The same natural beauty

Better interaction in community

Although options for recreation, community involvement, and employment are desired for community members of all ages, participants especially emphasized a desire for more opportunities for young people in rural communities. As a strategy for local community development, youth would like to see more parks and more youth buildings and "hangouts." While some comments certainly presented a laundry list of desired facilities and programs, overall, this theme focused on a desire for more common spaces that would allow youth to engage in enjoyable, safe activities.

I wish we had a shopping mall, arcade, rollerskating, and ice skating park and other activities that have an positive impact on all young people . Also, need to provide a TEEN CLUB too.

I would hope to see more parks and places to have fun

A lot more community services, more places to hang out at, and definitely a pool

Sports places for kids and adults, stores with clothing in it, rollerblading places and all year round ice skating

More place for people to be or have fun so that they are not all over the streets.

I would hope to see people having fun with all of their friends
outside instead of sitting inside play video games

More things for younger kids to do so they stay out of trouble

More recreation for children and adults

Youth recognize economic growth and improved schools as central to
the future of their rural communities. In this, many comments reflect a
desire to create higher quality job and educational opportunities while
maintaining the rural atmosphere.

If I left my community for 5 years and then returned I would hope
to see maybe more people getting better education

Job opportunities while maintaining the rural feel

Other kids doing something useful with their lives

Economic growth from good companies

Better advanced programs in schools

More businesses to come in for more jobs. For the school to stay
up to date.

Better schools since the schools don't really have money and better
neighborhoods

I would want to see more places to work and jobs that pay more
money then the jobs we have here today

If I left my community for five years and then returned, I would
expect to see nicer schools that have programs for people who
have difficulties with money

Less big companies taking all the money

A better educated population

For the school to stay up to date

Youth comments reflect somewhat of a divided opinion about the type of desired development in their communities. Numerous comments emphasize downtown revitalization and open space protection. Other comments focus on a desire to increase development of malls and other amenities in their rural communities, sometimes mentioning specific stores and amenities that they would like to see as economic development. To this end, youth express a desire to see:

Economic growth from good companies

More business moved in downtown

Better economy, more businesses (manufacturing, etc.)

Nice trees, cleaned up buildings, small businesses/ restaurants

The land still there and not turned into housing

That it had finally changed for the better and downtown had improved

I would hope to see my community as a strong agricultural community where everyone knows everyone...just like it is now. (I hope it doesn't change much)

Open store fronts, people walking around

I would hope to see a better downtown than what we have now.

More land without stores on it

I would hope to see…less housing developments and more farms

I would hope that all the green space would still be there and no more farms were driven out of business.

More workplaces & every store downtown open

More businesses and developments

New shops, more city like

A bigger shopping area

A mall and a Pizza Hut

If we were to have clothing stores closer and more restaurants that are closer and to our convenience

With this range of comments in mind, overall youth sentiment reflects a need to find balance between retaining the qualities of their rural communities that are valued—such as open space and a small, close-knit social structure– and promoting new opportunities that encourage growth and reduce isolation. As one participant stated, ultimately, "I would like to see a better place and…I would want it to be the same in some ways so I remember what it was like before I left." To summarize, in the future, youth generally hope to see:

Clean and beautiful communities—well maintained, colorful, well-painted, no littering

Economic growth—more businesses and stores, with open storefronts downtown and increased access to convenient shopping

Better educational and employment opportunities; reduced local poverty

Farms, open space, and specific places for both outdoor and indoor recreation

Community unity and engagement

More opportunities and amenities designed with youth in mind

3.5.2-4 What is needed

Youth recognize that if their desired future is to become the reality, it will require the active participation of concerned citizens. Youth comments reflect an understanding that the desired change will not just happen overnight, but will take time and commitment.

Be a good citizen. Be active in organizations offered to me.

Need more people to volunteer for activities

A lot of work, and a will to just go

People taking action

More involvement of the community

Teamwork and a real effort

Cooperation

Change my attitude

Persistence

People would have to work together

People trying to make a change

Concerned committed citizens and government

Join a group for leadership, go to town meetings, petition

Make up a petition form for all the residents to sign agreeing to make a big change and difference in the community.

Make people aware of the problems

Influence people to make a difference

Along these lines, youth comments further suggest the need for more activities that bring community members together. Proposals to this end

include both social gatherings and opportunities for civic participation—suggesting that youth indeed recognize a need to develop social capital in their communities.

> Give community get-togethers so we can get to know one another more
>
> Have more activities for families to do with each other, and more ways to bring community members together
>
> Get more people involved in community projects
>
> Make more community gatherings and cross-cultural events
>
> I think there should be…more activities for the community to get involved with
>
> People coming together
>
> Get parents more involved with students education
>
> Being involved in community activities and being active in the community

In order to achieve this desired future for their rural communities, youth visioning participants describe a need for increased youth opportunities, including both recreational facilities and community service-oriented programs. Comments suggest youth sentiment that their communities need to actively promote youth engagement and listen to youth voice.

> A safe place that youth can go to and not have to worry if they are okay and not doing something that they aren't suppose to be doing. It is too easy for them to get into trouble finding there own

thing to do vs. having a place to go to and play some sports, and maybe some art activities and such.

Have more youth programs. Start working with groups of young people.

More community service by all students

Youth buildings

More parks with stuff that older kids like not little kids like a rock wall or a go- cart track.

We could have a sports complex for stuff like swimming, soccer, basketball, and maybe other sports like that. Also some community service projects.

A community center would be great. That way high school students could teach elementary students their hobbies during the summer, almost like a camp.

Provide more activities that youth are interested in. They like skateboarding, let's make a park for them; they like video games, let's provide a game room

Need more student/community activities

More teen centers that kids who don't work on farms and already have enough to do can go to and stay out of trouble

People need to care about youth

Get something started for people to donate books for a library

Putting up a notice a couple of weeks in advance where we [youth] can see it!

Youth describe a need for community members of all ages to cultivate pride in community appearance and cleanliness, and take an active role in various maintenance and beautification initiatives. Emerging opportunities in this area focus on citizen participation efforts such as organized clean ups. Youth also pointed to the need for improved safety infrastructure such as crosswalks, sidewalks, improved roads, and the use of crossing guards in certain situations to make their communities more accessible to youth.

Making a litter pick-up a job for people

Need more sidewalks

Use some of the unused buildings

Rehab existing structures

Need crosser for small kids walking home from school

People to clean the street and clean up the trash

Pick up garbage and try to tell people to put their cigarette butts in a pail so that they aren't all over the sidewalk.

Have a day to clean up places like the fairgrounds so…children could have a cleaner environment to play in. Maybe they could paint the fairgrounds to so it would be colorful.

Find ways to keep it more clean

Volunteer to pick up trash on the streets

Kids and parents replanting or cleaning land or property

Get the youth together and plan a day to clean up the town

Recycle and pick up garbage

We should start fixing up our old playground

Youth emphasize a need for increased education and economic development in their communities. In order to be effective at achieving their desired future, this economic environment must promote better paying jobs for all community members-- including improved job opportunities for teens.

More livable paying jobs

More small businesses come to town

An increase of youth work to my area

Increased job opportunities for people who are poor, have disabilities and have limited education.

Jobs for teens and a way to get there

Better jobs, more interest in education, more interest in making the community better etc

Take education outside school– internships

Become more active in the revitalization of downtown

More jobs for both people who have skills and people who don't

Create more jobs and protect the land

Better employment

Get a good job and support the community

Build more business

Higher skilled workers and better school

School, business, college and industry

Improvement of educational status of community will raise opportunities for children in the future

Encourage kids to stay in and really care about school

Youth comments also reflect the practical recognition that financial resources ultimately play a key role in the achievement of the desired future. To complement their emphasis on civic engagement and the importance of active participation, youth emphasize the potential for fundraisers, donations, and other ways to raise money from community members as a means of achieving their desired public good.

> Need better money management within the community
>
> Fund raisers to help other people in need
>
> I think I could raise money so we could have more fun in our community like have a bake sale or something like that
>
> Create ways for the county to raise money
>
> Get people to raise money to build small parks or mini shops that are open on weekends
>
> Raise the money needed
>
> More state funding to upstate
>
> Fundraisers or donate money for parks
>
> For the town to make more money
>
> [People to] get more money by getting paid more
>
> Greater budget
>
> SOS - Save Our Schools - raised money for sports and activities when the school budget got voted down
>
> $$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$$

Although youth may not have the professional vocabulary or advanced knowledge of community development theories, youth comments nonetheless touch upon a number of broader community development

issues, from downtown revitalization to local project funding, suggesting a potential role for youth in the community development processes.

3.5.3 Findings Specific to Rural Schools and Youth

Within the overall context of the New York State Rural Visioning Project, the theme of Rural Schools and Youth deserves special merit in our examination of the findings from the youth visioning. Although youth comments on this topic are found dispersed throughout the Community Issue Findings, as presented in Section B of this report, the following paragraphs summarize youth comments related specifically to the themes of Education, Schools, and Youth. From the Youth Rural Visioning Survey, "Education" and "Schools and Youth" were the two issues most frequently identified by youth survey participants as "extremely" and "very" important in their communities, with 80.4% and 77.5% respectively categorizing them as such.

When it comes specifically to their schooling, it is hardly surprising that youth focused mainly on their areas of experience and expertise. Their likes and dislikes reflect realities that they experience every day in school. These youth are thus situated to offer a unique perspective on this topic—an insider's view. Although some of these comments may be thought of as operating on a very individual level (e.g. specific sports programs) they can provide much insight into what to focus on in order to make education more effective in actually reaching youth.

Youth recognize the importance of education. At the same time, however, comments suggest that they feel alienated from the system as

currently structured—or, if not personally, see some of their peers as feeling this way.

> If I left my community for 5 years and then returned I would hope to see maybe more people getting better education
>
> Improvement of educational status of community will raise opportunities for children in the future
>
> Teachers complain to your parents that you need extra help, but then when you go in, the teacher is always busy
>
> Need to encourage kids to stay in and really care about school
>
> One thing that bothers me is that a lot of kids are not getting the education they need. For example a lot of kids tend to skip school and some people do not pay attention in class so they do not know what they need to know in order to get a job.
>
> Teachers complain to your parents that you need extra help, but then when you go in, the teacher is always busy

In addition to the more typical comments that adults might expect from students (after all, who actually *likes* homework?), youth comments suggest that the current education system seems to place too much emphasis on note-taking and not enough on the total student. With this in mind, students in both the workshop and online survey point to the need for more activities that integrate school and community, and the importance of experiences such as internships that "take education outside school." Students seem bored with the current state of their community's programming.

Too concerned about Regents, SATs, and ACTs rather than focusing a little bit more on life skills

Take education outside school—internships

More student/community activities

New technology

More community service by all students.

A community center would be great. That way high school students could teach elementary students their hobbies during the summer, almost like a camp

Need more student/community activities

Some community service projects

Need better advanced programs in schools.

Need more trips and less notes

Innovative ideas in the classroom

Offer classes such as agricultural education (which our school does not offer, yet surrounding schools do)

Taken together, these youth comments point to the need to create a more student-friendly atmosphere and develop a more real-world oriented curriculum—perhaps by giving youth more voice in the decision-making process.

Start working with groups of young people.

Be a good citizen. Be active in organizations offered to me.

Need a better interview process (to account for student opinion)

Join a group for leadership, go to town meetings, petition

Get the youth together and plan a day to clean up the town

> More involvement of the community
>
> Change my attitude
>
> Influence people to make a difference

   To paraphrase a question asked by one youth during the April 2006 STARR workshop, how can youth take a proactive role given that the school system just doesn't seem to care? Based on these comments, it appears that youth would like more of an active role in the educational and community-building process. Rather than being passive members of their schools and community, comments suggest that youth are willing to take initiative.

Chapter Four: Policy and Programmatic Recommendations and Implications

After thus examining the current state of New York's rural schools and youth via the several projects described in the preceding sections, it is now possible to delve into some policy/programmatic suggestions with the intent of bridging the three-pronged gap that Listening Session participants suggest exists between youth and the community, adult community members and youth, and youth and policymakers. Examining both the New York State context and broader theory and data, this section sets out to examine the fundamental question of what can actually be done to positively impact youth in rural New York.

Overall, as we shall continue to see in subsequent sections, RVP participants described a flawed system of federal (No Child Left Behind) and state (Regents) policy, questioning what they see as the exclusive use of inflexible standards and testing to determine educational quality. Within this rigid framework, a "quality" education is defined simply as a student doing better than he/she did in the past on these multiple choice tests and/or exceeding averages as a national standard.

In this, it seems that the ability to ace multiple choice tests has become the primary goal of educational policy, at the expense of what RVP participants see as the real goals of preparing New York's rural youth for a lifetime of experiences beyond the classroom. Whatever learning standards the tests promulgated under the NCLB and Regents legislation are theoretically designed to measure, the testing itself seems to have become the ultimate goal, rather than such tests serving as the *means* by which to

achieve the broader educational goal of preparing students to lead productive and fulfilling lives in communities.

In contrast to the form of "teaching to the test" perpetuated under this system, RVP participants see the potential integration of school and community as a means to promote what they suggest are the ultimate goals of rural education: workforce development, citizenship and civic participation, community development, and, in general, preparing students for whatever productive role they choose in society. More than just developing the ability to circle *a, b*, or *c* on a multiple choice test, as we shall see, education which integrates school and community encourages students to engage with their learning through the active development of meaningful connections. This educational policy produces demonstratable learning results—including many of the very same standards currently measured by the same inflexible tests denounced by RVP participants—while simultaneously reducing student alienation.

In order to examine these themes in detail., Section 4.1 provides a brief review of the unique rural policy challenge; Section 4.2 focuses on several specific policy recommendations that emerged from the Rural Visioning Project, including an overview of relevant background research/literature; and Section 4.3 situates these policy recommendations within the current drive for state and national standards and various measures of student achievement.

4.1 The Unique Rural School Reform Context

In the 2007 State of the State address, then New York State governor Eliot Spitzer specifically targeted educational reform as a major theme for the state, making the bold statement that "school districts must invest in programs that have been proven to work" (Adapting to the Innovation Economy section, para. 5). Such a statement, though sensible, proves deceptively simple. Although often discussed and debated through various conferences and symposiums, just what programs have been "proven to work" for rural areas has remained elusive.

According to the 1995 report *Understanding Rural America*, authorized by the Economic Research Service (ERS):

> Understanding rural America is no easy task. It is tempting to generalize and oversimplify, to characterize rural areas as they once were or as they now are in only some places. Understanding rural America requires understanding the ongoing changes and diversity that shape it.…No single policy can sufficiently address the needs of all. (Conclusions section, para. 1)

So where does this leave us? What policy options should be employed? If there is no one single cure-all policy, what policy action can realistically be taken? Because the culture of rural America plays an important role—both positive and negative—in the delivery of services such as education (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2002), how can the unique needs of rural America best be addressed through a policy framework?

As previous studies support, the unique educational setting of rural communities necessitates the creation of policies which foster unique educational opportunities for rural youth. Echoing themes raised by

participants in the Rural Visioning Project Listening Sessions as described in Section I of this report, Natchigal (1982) describes the immediate need for an educational policy which focuses on rural areas:

> Rural communities are not miniature versions of the cities; they have different characteristics and different needs. Small rural schools that have traditionally been considered the weakest link in the public school system are now being hit the hardest by the triple threats of declining enrollment, limited resources, and increasing demands for program accountability. A model of schooling that was only marginally appropriate for rural communities under the best of conditions is rapidly becoming untenable as conditions become even more difficult. (p. 12)

Rural education reform has indeed garnered increasing attention; however the strengths and needs of rural schools have, to a large extent, been overlooked at the national level in official conversations about school reform (Kannapel &DeYoung, 1999).

For example, a recent *New York Times* article titled "Lawmakers say needs of rural schools are overlooked" (Dillon, 2010) draws attention to this fact, citing one particular example related to the No Child law's teacher-quality provisions. This law, which requires teachers to have a degree in every major subject area they teach, often proves impractical in remote rural schools, where most teachers find themselves leading classes in several different subjects—the practical result of small rural schools attempting to make the most out of limited resources, given low school enrollments, budget constraints, and difficulty attracting teachers. Rather than looking at whether students are learning as a means of evaluating teacher effectiveness, this focus on teacher credentials largely ignores the realities of rural schools.

Several recent signs suggest increasing recognition, on a policy level, of the importance of specifically targeting this rural education challenge: in essence, finding what works for rural education and creating policy based on these tactics. In October of 2009, Alaska appointed its first director of Rural Education, charged with the creation of connections between school boards, nonprofit organizations, Native and rural communities and parents in order to "build the capacity of the department, school districts and rural communities to meet the academic needs of rural students" (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, 2010a; 2010b, para 3). Nationally, the recently introduced Strengthening Community Opportunities through Rural Education Act of 2009 (H.R. 3180) seeks to establish the National Advisory Committee on Rural Education within the U.S. Department of Education, to study and make "policy recommendations for overcoming the unique challenges faced by rural public elementary and secondary school systems" (Congressional Research Service, 2009).

Bearing in mind this general policy context that recognizes the need to do something specific to rural areas, but does not specify just what that "something" is, we will now turn to an in-depth examination of rural school reform and several potential policy and programmatic initiatives to this end. The following policy recommendations are based on theory and data, in light of the Rural Visioning Project context and the issues identified by New York State residents of all ages.

4.2 Policies to Bridge the Gap between Youth, School, and Community

At the heart of the Rural Visioning Listening Session comments and what Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) term the "Rural School Problem," emerges a tension between locally identified issues and standardized state control. With this in mind, in his response to the Listening Session comments, published in the *Rural Visioning Project Phase I Report*, Sipple (2006) established the fundamental challenge as reflective of this tension.

> The state is arguing that the centralized curricula, etc. is key to raising the standard of living and economic potential for the state. The respondents argue that it is the very centralization of decision-making that impacts high school offerings and results in student disengagement and lack of success. It is this juncture that we need to focus our conversations, alter our educational practice and policies (local and state), and aim our research. (p.116)

By focusing attention at this "juncture," we can hope to overcome student alienation and reengage youth with school and community. *The central question in this equation then becomes: Is it possible to simultaneously "overcome student disengagement" and achieve state standards? And, if so, what sort of educational paradigm can successfully target this juncture?*

Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) frame this same tension as a central question of just who schools should serve—the local community, the broader society, or a combination of the two (p.70). They assert that historically, under the "urban model" or "factory model" of schooling, educators have tended to look down upon rural youth who do not aspire to leave the community, while, at the same time, rural families would typically like their younger members to remain close to home (Kannapel & DeYoung,

123

1999, pp.71-72). This tension was certainly apparent throughout the comments and issues raised at the Rural Visioning Project Listening Sessions, as in the concern about outmigration of educated youth from rural communities, perceived stigma associated with BOCES/ CTE as opposed to traditional college prep education, and the described mismatch between rigid state/national standards and community values and needs.

Given the goal of enhancing student engagement and reducing student alienation, the policy recommendations set forth in this section will focus on those policies and programs that directly impact students—a theme that can be broadly categorized as learning environment—rather than on the organizational and logistical facets of rural schools. Although it is impossible within the confines of this paper to analyze and account for each and every issue or challenge set forth by adult and youth participants in the Rural Visioning Project, several overarching themes emerged as particularly relevant, and therefore will form the core of these educational policy and program recommendations.

The sentiments expressed by adults in the RVP Listening Sessions, as discussed in depth in Part I, reflect a strong desire to utilize the perceived strengths and needs of rural communities, schools, and youth to combat the current alienation of youth. At the same time, the sentiments expressed by youth and described in Part II reflect a desire for increased opportunities to bridge what they experience as a gap between school, community, and life in general. With this in mind, this section examines major ways in which educational policy may be developed that positively influences both goals simultaneously.

The primary theme emerging from both the Rural Visioning Project Listening Sessions and the Youth Engagement activities can thus broadly be categorized as the integration of school/youth and community. As identified by adult and youth participants, this integration can take many forms, including internships, community service, youth-designed projects, and other forms of experiential learning.

According to Kannapel and DeYoung (1999), scholars suggest that successful rural school improvement efforts capitalize on one of the major strengths of rural schools: the strong connections among school, community, and place (p.73). School improvement projects that are "truly rural" share certain characteristics in that they 1) are rooted in a sense of place; 2) value outcomes that arise from individual situations and context, rather than from predetermined results; 3) welcome contributions from those who are usually marginalized in traditional community development efforts (including youth themselves); 4) are comprehensive, long-term, and multidimensional; and 5) are grounded in the philosophy that rural schools and communities can best strengthen themselves (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999, p.73). All of these aspects can be interpreted as strategies for bridging the gap between youth, schools, and communities with the overall goal of reducing alienation (and school dropout rates) by creating a sense of community ownership in education.

While RVP participants may not have quantified their overwhelmingly positive comments about the impact of local schools on their communities, such documentation and quantification does exist. From a community's standpoint, local schools serve various social and community purposes beyond purely the academic. Tom Lyson (2002), of Cornell University, in

his work to document and quantify the importance of what a school actually means to small rural communities, concludes that "schools serve as important markers of social and economic viability and vitality" (p. 136). In rural areas, schools often represent a focal point of community identity and activity—the "hub that holds the community together" (Nachitgal, 1982, p. 11). Thus, the question of interests plays out on a broader level, encompassing issues of both academics and community when examining just what a school actually means to a rural community and its people, and what policies are most appropriate. These studies suggest that school and community exist in a reciprocal relationship: just as the community plays an important role in school, so the school plays an important role in the community. Thus, the rural school-community relationship emerges as crucial to community sustainability (Collins, 1999). By this measure, any policy designed to strengthen rural schools also strengthens rural communities.

As we shall see through our exploration of the following policies and programs, central to reducing the alienation of youth from both school and community, the integration of the two may actually serve to increase engagement with both and thus to foster both youth and community development.

Because these policies are inherently interrelated, with some overlapping themes and characteristics, they are listed below in their logical order, each policy building off the policies described before it.

1. Listen to what residents, of all ages, have to say about education and school reform and program design.

2. Encourage active and hands-on learning that allows students to make connections between the various subjects and real-world applications.

3. Allow for flexible curriculum that enables schools and communities to work together to make use of their strengths.

4. Increase focus on programs based upon the connection between economic development and education, linking school improvement and community economic development to the benefit of both

5. Implement programs and curriculum that actively engage youth in the community planning and development process.

4.2.1 Policy One

Listen to what residents, of all ages, have to say about education and school reform in program design.

Recognizing that "listening" alone is probably not enough—that the real challenge will be how to reconcile the multitude of voices to develop a coherent educational policy— this policy formulation is included here to suggest an important, yet often untapped, role for such "non-traditional" dialogue in educational policymaking.

The meaningful involvement of ordinary citizens in the policymaking process can help solve complicated social and environmental problems by contributing local contextual knowledge to professionals' expertise (Fischer, 2000; Lindblom & Cohen, 1979). As Fischer (2000) posits, "(we) shall take the position that while no evidence suggests that the general citizenry can

127

altogether reject the experts and go it alone in a complex society, the citizenry is more intelligent than many conservative politicians and opinion researchers suggest" (p.34). From a policy standpoint, therefore, perhaps the first step in designing and implementing effective policy is recognizing the merits of "ordinary knowledge" (Lindblom & Cohen, 1979), such as that collected through the Rural Visioning Project. While this may seem like an obvious policy suggestion, in reality, it is deceptively complex and requires a fundamental rethinking of the ways in which we value social science research. Rather than defining social science research as exclusively within the realm of "experts," such an approach challenges policymakers to expand the notion of research to include knowledge produced by ordinary citizens. Indeed, this notion serves as a keystone for the remaining four policy and programmatic recommendations, as these recommendations are based on information collected through this ordinary-knowledge paradigm rather than more formal methods of professional social inquiry.

In the creation of policy, why should we care what residents of these communities identify as needed reforms? Within the context of traditional education, and centered in the rural context, three central normative questions can help us answer this: What are the purposes of education? Whose interests are served? And who gets to decide? (Theobald & Natchigal, 1995; Nachtigal, 1997)

To this end, Brooks (1991), in his examination of the effects of curricular policy on local constituencies, has established a set of negative messages that the local community (teachers, parents, administrators, etc) receives when the educational agenda/curriculum is determined by outside agencies (as cited in Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004). Negative messages

received by the local community include "Curriculum development is not our responsibility," "We [the outside agency] do not trust you [the local constituency]," "Past effectiveness does not matter," and "Minimum competency is the desired outcome" (Brooks, as cited in Cooper et al., 2004, p. 176). All of these negative messages suggest a devaluation of local knowledge in the educational arena, sending the message that local constituencies have no role to play in the creation of the policy that impacts their local schools, and giving rise to what Seal and Harmon (1995) describe as a "resistive, oppositional culture" (p.5).

At the same time, literature suggests that generic reforms often do not succeed when they are externally imposed upon rural schools and therefore might lack buy-in from the local community (Branscome, 1982; Dunne, 1982; McLaughlin, 1982, as cited in Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999). Despite the best of intentions, policy and programmatic interventions that are incongruent with the values and goals of the target audience are not likely to obtain local acceptance and long-tem success (Peters, Wilson, & Peterson, 1986, as cited in Wilson and Peterson, 1988). Based on a series of case studies presented in his edited volume, Nachtigal (1982) concluded that the most successful educational interventions "[have] a high level of congruence with the social history of their areas and [meet] educational needs that [are] clearly recognized and articulated by the local communities." On the other hand, those that are unsuccessful fail to acknowledge and respond to the reality of the local context (p. 273).

All the funding in the world—although certainly a necessary ingredient in implementing any educational program—cannot replace community support. Nachtigal (1982) describes that heavily funded efforts

are not necessarily more successful than those that operate on small local budgets, and suggests the danger of "over-funding" small school projects in terms of durability (p. 282). *This is not meant to say that funding is not a crucial piece of the equation, but rather more to suggest that it is not the entire equation in and of itself.*

With this in mind, perhaps the most effective policy that can be designed to promote successful rural education programs—those which reduce alienation and simultaneously promote high academic standards—comes from within the community itself. Vito Perrone, a senior faculty member at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, targets this in the following policy recommendation presented at the Annenberg Rural Challenge conference:

> Maybe its time for policy makers to acknowledge that they have been very successful in starting a debate, and declare this a major victory. Then invite a consortium of local schools and communities to come together and develop standards and accountability systems that they believe respond better to local needs, and address large education concerns in a public manner. (Rural Challenge, 1999)

On a national level, there is evidence that something like this is indeed occurring. With the initiation of the 2009 *Listening and Learning* tour sponsored by the US Department of Education, this grass-roots policy approach seems to be taking hold. Through this initiative, Education Secretary Arne Duncan is currently traveling to 15 or more states in order to solicit feedback from a broad group of stakeholders, including elected officials, school administrators, teachers, parents, local employers, and students, around federal education policy (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2009a). As reported on the *Ed.Gov.Blog* (ED, 2009b, 2009c), Secretary

Duncan's visits to Vermont and Wyoming, for example, focused largely on the challenges of teaching and learning in rural America as perceived by teachers, families, and others who are intimately involved with the realities of rural education.

Duncan describes the purpose of this listening tour as follows: "Before crafting education law in Washington, we want to hear from people across America—parents, teachers and administrators—about the everyday issues and challenges in our schools that need our national attention and support" (ED, 2009a, para. 4). This "listening" format certainly appears indicative of increasing national recognition of the importance of local knowledge about the realities of rural education. As this national initiative progresses, perhaps such a format will come to serve as a model for further engagement with residents of rural communities around these issues.

In order to combat the negative messages described by Brooks (as cited in Cooper, Fusarelli, & Randall, 2004), any successful policy must first foster discussion of these educational issues within the local community, with the goal of facilitating local engagement and ownership in the process, and, ultimately, strengthening the overall educational system. In order to accomplish this, as a means of linking educational policymaking with this diverse ordinary knowledge base, local school boards might focus on being as representative a cross-section as possible of the communities they are trying to represent—that is, to think in terms of school board seats which are 50-50 women and men, of proportional age, ethnic, and SES mixes. Doing so would help to ensure that the resulting educational policy most accurately reflects the local context, and would minimize disenfranchisement

131

of any stakeholder group—helping to create policies which will be met with crucial local acceptance and long-term success.

As Nachtigal (1982) asserts, "Unless the locals are convinced it's worth doing, it won't work" (p. 282). This lends particular weight and credibility to the problem and solution definition by community members in New York's Rural Visioning Project, for RVP participants are "the locals" upon whom success of rural school improvement ultimately comes to rest. Within the New York State context, therefore, the various Listening Sessions certainly provided a forum for local residents—including youth—to describe and discuss just what actually *is* meaningful to them.

4.2.2 Policy Two
Encourage active and hands-on learning that allows students to make connections between the various subjects and real-world applications.

RVP Context: Concerns regarding what RVP participants see as an increasingly rigid educational paradigm that promotes an emphasis on standardized testing were cited at six out of nine Listening Sessions, with comments from at least three Listening Sessions specifically naming a disconcerting "mismatch" between education and reality. Students are perceived as disengaged from their schools and communities. To this end, hands-on activities, in forms such as experiential and service learning, were seen as critical to overcoming alienation. Raw comments are listed in Appendix C.

Background: Expressing belief in the importance of attaching learning to a more grounded context as a means towards increasing students'

engagement is a concept with deep-seated historical roots in educational theory. More than one hundred and fifty years ago, Alexis deTocqueville observed that "True information is mainly derived from experience." John Dewey (as cited in Long et al. 2003), often referred to as the father of modern education, argued for the importance of context as a critical part of learning, asserting that from the child's standpoint, the disconnect between what is learned in school and daily life establishes school as a potential waste. Dewey thus suggested that schools should be connected with the rest of life, where students learn through engagement in meaningful activities, rather than operate as isolated entities. Almost 100 years ago, Dewey (1916), contrasted the "plasticity" (p. 44) of learning from such experience to the "static, cold storage" (p. 158) view of knowledge perpetuated by the current model of schooling. Dewey effectively predicted the alienation fostered under the current educational paradigm—the same alienation described by RVP participants— commenting on this disassociation, "We might as well set the pupil to observing carefully cracks on the wall and set him to memorizing meaningless lists of words in an unknown tongue" (p. 67).

Smith (2002) takes Dewey's praxis one step further, asserting that "valuable knowledge for most children is knowledge that is directly related to their own social reality" (p.586). According to Hughes, Bailey, and Mechur (2001), developments in research on learning and pedagogy emphasize the effectiveness of this "learning in context" (p.10). Cognitive psychologists such as Vygotsky and Piaget argue that students learn more effectively if they are taught skills in the context in which they will use those skills.

In order to accomplish this, the experiential education suggested by RVP participants occupies a central role in what Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) term "appropriate rural school improvement." Through the years, various terms have been coined as variations on this general idea: experiential learning, applied learning, contextual learning, and, most recently, place-based education (Long, Bush, & Theobald, 2003). All of these labels, however, emphasize learning by doing and the importance of connecting content with context.

This type of education can broadly be broken down into five categories, which are not mutually exclusive by any means: cultural studies, nature studies, real-world problem solving, internships and entrepreneurship experiences, and, perhaps most comprehensively, induction into community processes (Smith, 2002). By connecting academic content to the real-world experiences of students, all of these diverse programs have a common theme: they seek to increase the chances that all children will derive meaning from their studies and overcome the compartmentalization of knowledge (Nachtigal, 1997).

Based on interviews conducted with potential dropouts, those students who are arguably the most alienated from education, Smith (2002) concludes that "such students remain on the margins of school in part because of their unwillingness to accept the pronouncements of teachers about what is or is not valuable knowledge. They know differently." (p.587) Viewed through this lens, education that encourages students to discover for themselves what is or is not valuable knowledge, through active experiences in the community, will likely reduce this alienation.

Indeed, research suggests that increased student involvement in school and engagement in classroom activities corresponds with reduced risk of dropping out (SEDL, 2010). On the other hand, the more alienated and disengaged students are from school, the greater their risk of dropping out (Catterall, 1986). With this in mind, a focus on engaging youth in school and learning has thus emerged as a key component of effective dropout prevention efforts (Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004). Programs that support student engagement help students to cultivate connections with the learning environment across a variety of disciplines (Lehr et al., 2004). Based on a body of work generated by the National Dropout Prevention Center, Schargel and Smink (2001) suggest that the strategies of active learning, service learning, and making the most of the wider community play an important role in reducing student alienation, as measured by reducing the dropout rate. Such engagement in academic learning should be the fundamental goal of all education policymaking (Elmore, as cited in Cooper et al., 2004).

Within this overall drive for engaged learning as a way to reduce alienation, several policy initiatives emerge as particularly relevant: place-based education, linkages between education and economic development, and youth induction into community development. All of these policy suggestions are inherently experiential, and driven by a focus on the integration of youth, school, and community as a means of increasing youth engagement, reducing alienation, and enhancing learning.

4.2.3 Policy Three

Allow for flexible curriculum that enables schools and communities to work together to make use of their strengths.

RVP Context: As described by Rural Visioning Project participants—both youth and adult—rural schools exist within a favorable climate of strong community support, occupying an integral position as center[s] of the community. Small rural schools and supportive communities are described as offering increased opportunities for active participation. In line with the active learning ideal described above in the second policy recommendation, widespread sentiment exists that schools offer strong potential for community engagement. Participants felt that the development of a framework to better encourage school-community collaboration would foster a sense of community ownership among students. In order to build on these strengths, participants expressed a desire for greater local control and the integration of the local community into the curriculum. Comments emphasizing the existence of a positive linkage between rural schools and communities were made at seven out of nine Listening Sessions, thus suggesting a clear need for policy in support of this. Findings reflect a desire for educated youth to remain in, or return to, the local area—with participants at six of the nine Listening Sessions mentioning this as a priority outcome. Raw comments to this end may be found in Appendix D.

Background: One of the commonly mentioned characteristics of rural social life is attachment to place (Howley & Howley, 1995; Seal & Harmon, 1995; Theobald, 1997). The relationship of rural youth to their local communities is tied to a number of diverse factors beyond simple economic

opportunity (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Garasky, 2002; Wilson &Peterson, 1988). In a Rural Attitude Survey of 108 college students in rural North Carolina, Herzog and Pittman (1995) document positive feelings associated with home, family, and community in these rural areas, and suggest that successful rural school reform must capitalize on these important ties identified by students.

Still, historically, literature suggests that children in rural areas have been educated and socialized under the impression that the places they come from are somehow inferior and that the only real opportunity is to leave for bigger and better options. As Charles Barron, leader of the Delta Five Cluster, a collaborative network of schools in the rural Mississippi Delta, states:

> So often we teach these children that everything about where they live is bad—no jobs, no industry, not a lot of education, the school districts are poor, the towns are poor—and that is what we have been teaching them (as cited in King, 2003, p. 25).

Because rural education has long been accused of being an "extractive activity," with education touted as a ticket to elsewhere with the best and brightest being encouraged to leave, it is especially important to enable students to recognize and utilize the strengths and resources available in such communities if we hope to foster healthy rural youth and, ultimately, healthy communities (Long et al., 2003, p.8).

Piggy-backing from the active learning paradigm outlined in the previous policy recommendation, many rural educators, including those affiliated with the Rural School and Community Trust, now tout the success of unique place-based curricula that attach school subjects to the local community (Long et al., 2003). Perhaps the best known of these

approaches—one that is widely known even outside the educational field, and has emerged as something of a cultural icon—was Foxfire, by which student research in a local community eventually produced a well-known magazine and a series of books.

After conducting a survey of the literature on place-based education, Woodhouse and Knapp (2000) have laid out several distinct characteristics:

1. It emerges from the particular attributes of a place;
2. It is fundamentally multidisciplinary;
3. It is inherently experiential;
4. It is reflective of an educational philosophy that reflects values broader than simple economics; and
5. It connects place with concepts of self and community (p.4).

Such education is thus best understood as a process by which the product will, by definition, be unique in each local circumstance (Long et al., 2003).

Several real-life examples help in understanding what practical shape this educational theory actually may take:

1. Related to cultural values and knowledge, the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, which was initially funded by the National Science Foundation, linked Alaska Native culture and indigenous subsistence knowledge to develop specialized curricula that related basic math and science concepts to the local environment (Loveland, 2003).
2. Related to the natural environment, students in Tillamook, Oregon—an area traditionally dependent upon the logging industry— worked with the Oregon Department of Forestry to

survey the status of logged areas, develop strategies for the future, and create an interpretive walkway (Loveland, 2003).

3. Related to broader issues of local interest, twenty nine school districts in Virginia and Kentucky are engaging students in media projects that address issues confronting central Appalachia, through means such as the creation of video documentaries about the lack of local access to emergency medical care and the production of historical pieces focused on preserving local heritage (Nedwell, 2003).

Bearing in mind that this community-centered learning varies along with the diversity and unique resources of the community, as these examples demonstrates, it is not possible to lay out one concrete blueprint for place-based educational policy.

Sehr (as cited in Engel, 2000) lists five practices of democratic public schools, all of which, by definition, are facilitated by schools that are themselves connected to and integrated with their communities, as in the above examples. In this, these schools encourage students to explore their interdependence with others and with nature; study social justice issues; discuss, debate, and act on public issues; critically evaluate their social reality; and develop participatory skills.

Such education operates under the basic premise that we need a "fundamental rethinking" of the educational system towards reconnecting the process of education with life in communities—relating the purpose of education back to a reality with which students can connect and actively engage (Nachtigal, 1997, p. 24). Through such inherently multidisciplinary experiences, students can learn mathematics, science, social and technology

skills, and civics, and virtually any other discipline (Knapp, 1996). By redesigning the educational system to refocus education on the local context as the chief curricular focus, this "true school renewal" makes learning more experiential and thereby more powerful, through the use of activities that connect with one's own experience, require the use of skills from various disciplines, are carried out in cooperation with others, and result in a useful product (Theobald & Natchigal, 1995, p. 9).

4.2.4 Policy Four

Increase the focus on programs based upon the connection between economic development and education, linking school improvement and community economic development to the benefit of both.

RVP Context: Comments at no fewer than six of nine Listening Sessions reflect the recognition that education and economic development are inherently complementary, again suggesting a clear need for policy to this end. Speaking to the future of rural schools and youth, comments at eight of the nine Listening Sessions expressed a desire for increased connections between school and career and better linkages between youth and local business. Problems associated with educational tracking, a stigma associated with BOCES and various forms of CTE, and its effects upon the community were emphasized at six of the nine Listening Sessions, with participants describing a desire for an educational policy which would equalize the value of vocational and academic education. Overall, participants felt that the development of partnerships between schools and local businesses, which may take the form of career awareness programs,

140

internships, mentoring, and job-shadowing, in all fields—including agriculture—would simultaneously promote youth development and community vitality. Findings reflect a desire for educated youth to remain in, or return to, the local area—with participants at six of the nine Listening Sessions mentioning this as a priority outcome. Raw comments are listed in Appendix E.

Background: If it is to succeed, the active and community-centered education outlined in previous sections recognizes that "appreciation of the rural culture and preparation for living and working in a global economy are not incompatible goals" (Kiley, 2006, p. 118). Indeed, the integration of these goals, through means such as various school-to-work initiatives, Career and Technical Education, and even local school-based enterprises, may serve an important role in reducing student alienation.

Speaking specifically about the results of a 1988 study prepared for the Appalachian Regional Commission—the first major national report to tackle the realities of school reform in small, rural schools—Brizius, Foster, and Patton (1988) assert that "the lack of a clear and compelling link between education and economic opportunity erodes the motivation of students and challenges the schools as they attempt to motivate student performance and reduce dropout rate" (as cited in Seal and Harmon, 1995, p.6). Following this assertion to its logical conclusion, then, it would appear that establishing a real and clearly visible link between education and economic opportunity is central to increasing student motivation, reducing dropout rates, and enhancing student's learning skills.

In recent years, this type of educational approach has been formally recognized by the California Workforce Investment Board (n.d.), which lists

among its goals towards the promotion of a sustainable economy for the future of the state, the "[Development of] a comprehensive youth workforce development system that links local community, youth development, and education stakeholders." Specific objectives of this program include the facilitation of school-to-work connections and the promotion of viable career paths through the engagement of youth in pre-apprenticeship programs. California's statewide initiative lends formal credibility to the potential of linking youth and community to achieve the state's ultimate goals of achieving an educated workforce and increasing economic development.

But what types of programs can contribute to the development of such a comprehensive system? With this in mind, the School-to Work Opportunities Act of 1994 specifies three kinds of opportunities: School-based learning oriented towards high academic standards; work-based learning leading to industry recognized credentials; and, most importantly for our purposes, connections between school-based and work-based learning, through career majors for applied or experiential learning (Hamilton & Ivry, 2001). Work-based learning, on a broader level, "represents the integration of workplace experiences and career and technical education (CTE) curriculum" (Brown, 2003, p. 1), and can include experiences such as job-shadowing, service learning, internships, and apprenticeships. In order to promote successful student outcomes, all of these programs must be well structured, integrated with the school curriculum, and culminate in products or services that demonstrate learning (Brown, 2003).

A comprehensive literature review of 132 studies of School-to-Work programs, as well as consultations with the staff of the National School-to-

Work Office, has led Hughes, Bailey, and Mechur (2001) to the following conclusions about the effectiveness of this School-to-Work initiative: (1) School-to-Work students maintain good grades and take difficult courses; (2) students in School-to-Work remain in school and receive their high school diplomas; (3) it is unclear how School-to-Work participation affects students' test scores; (4) School-to-Work students are prepared for college; (5) School-to-Work students can articulate their career interests and goals; (6) School-to-Work helps young people become prepared for the working world; (7) the jobs that students obtain through School-to-Work tend to be different from and of higher quality than the jobs they would normally get; (8) School-to-Work helps students plan for the future and act towards achieving their goals; (9) School-to-Work students feel that their teachers and peers are supportive; (10) School-to-Work enhances students' achievement in and perception of school; (11) teachers believe that School-to-Work benefits students; (12) teachers benefit from participating in work-based professional development associated with School-to-Work; (13) employers support the School-to-Work vision and initiative; (14) employer participation in School-to-Work partnerships and in work-based learning activities is widespread; and (15) employers speak highly of student interns and see benefits to their places of employment from participation in the program. Based on the conclusions of this seminal study, it appears that, although effects on test scores remain unknown, these programs do indeed support a wide range of achievement, career preparation, and general development, eliciting positive responses from students, teachers, and employers.

Studies show that students who participate in work-based learning—learning that is "intentionally structured to promote learning by linking work

with school" (Stasz & Stern, 1998, para. 2)—have greater attendance and are less likely to drop out of school, keeping the options of college and postsecondary education open to them (Hughes, Bailey, & Mechur, 2001). In this, apprenticeship programs have demonstrated success. For example, a study of five sites in Wisconsin (Urquiola, Stern, Horn, Dornsife, Chi, Williams, Merritt, Hughes, & Bailey, 1997, as cited in Chadd & Anderson, 2005) revealed that two control groups had statistically significant increases in absence rates, while the apprenticeship programs were successful in keeping down absenteeism. In this study, students in the apprentice group also demonstrated a statistically significant increase in grade point average (Urquiola et al., as cited in Chadd & Anderson, 2005). Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses have also demonstrated positive impacts on student dropout rates, college enrollment, high school attendance, and grade point averages (Hughes, Bailey, & Mechur, 2001).

Based on data from the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Plank, DeLuca, and Estacion (2008) conclude that, at least for students who are classified as "not old for grade," a middle-range mix of exposure to CTE and an academic curriculum can strengthen a student's attachment to and motivation while in school. Although critics of such an approach linking education initially feared that it would weaken academic achievement and relegate students to low-skill jobs, the body of research thus far has found no negative results to this end (Hughes, Bailey, & Mechur, 2001).

In their review of research on the "Rural School Problem," Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) point to several specific plans for rural school improvement that emphasize linking school activities with local economic development, citing Sher's (1977) model for school-based community

development and Rosenfeld's (1983) model for vocational agriculture programs as a means for school-based enterprises. Beyond simply benefitting student development, these initiatives demonstrate positive impacts on the local communities in which they operate.

First suggested by Jonathan Sher in the mid 1970s, the school-based enterprise model has multiple goals: creating jobs, strengthening ties between rural youth and their communities, giving rural youth real-life responsibilities, and offering them both entrepreneurial training and employment experience (Rosenfeld, 1983). Successful projects have involved rural youth in a variety of community-based, hands-on work experiences, from publishing a rural town's first weekly newspaper to operating child care centers and developing a computer-assisted swine management program (Rosenfeld, 1983). In rural Brooks County, Georgia, a construction company, a feeder pig organization and a child care center were all successfully developed after students at the local high school conducted a door-to-door survey to identify local community needs (Georgia REAL, 2007). The construction company built both the childcare center building and feeder pig operation on the school grounds, further demonstrating the self-sustaining nature of such projects.

Over time, this school based enterprise concept has been turned into a comprehensive curriculum program for rural schools, called Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning (REAL). With increased funding through grants from the Ford Foundation and Pew Charitable Trust, REAL programs have expanded to more than 30 states, helping high school, community college, and even younger students identify community needs

and then set up small business to address them (Larson, King, McGee, & Shea, 1997).

Features of these programs that serve as positive models for rural school reform include: leadership training, use of a problem-solving approach to the teaching of sciences and mathematics, strong community support, and entrepreneurial qualities (Rosenfeld, 1983). In order to be successful and eventually be able to carry out relevant tasks on their own, students must know when to ask questions, have the confidence to solve problems, and know how to work with others (Stasz & Stern, 1998). This type of learning thus "helps students to integrate knowledge and experience to gain a broad perspective of the learning and skill development that is required to make successful transitions from school to the workplace or further education" (Brown, 2003, p. 6).

Based on a body of evidence, Larson et al. (2007) assert that "Evaluations of REAL have found that the program successfully helps youth and business alike develop entrepreneurial and small business knowledge and expand their critical thinking and life skills" (p. 7). In so doing, these programs also positively impact the local communities in which they are situated. For example, between 1991 and 1997, in North Carolina, REAL participants started 212 new businesses and expanded, improved, or purchased 132 more, creating 280 full and part-time jobs and generating more than $5 million in new sales revenue (Larson et al., 2007).

Programs that merge educational objectives with local economic goals further demonstrate that the educational arena does not have to play out as a zero sum game. For example, an ongoing study conducted by Michigan State University Extension (LaRose, Steinfield, Whitten, & Lampe, 2008) focuses

146

on the need for rural areas to train and retain youth who are confident in Information and Communication Technology, in order to thrive in the new information economy. By conducting online community development forums to engage youth and small business owners in dialogue about entrepreneurial opportunities in their communities, this proposal seeks to use online social networking to forge new social ties between youth and entrepreneurs to "enhance the social capital of both groups and the communities they live in" (LaRose et al., 2008, para. 1). At the same time that they assist students in learning the skills necessary for life in the working world and beyond, these programs are designed to rebuild rural economies by reconnecting rural youth with their communities and economies.

4.2.5 Policy Five
Implement programs and curriculum that actively engage youth in the community planning and development process.

RVP Context: The desire for increased youth participation in the Visioning process, expressed by Listening Session participants, is in itself suggestive of this policy. In addition, the Youth Visioning Project also provides valuable insight into the relevance of policies that promote active youth engagement in processes of community development. Reflecting back on the sentiments expressed by rural youth as a part of the Youth Visioning, it certainly seems that youth in New York State crave this larger purpose and broader engagement. Rural youth participants in this project voiced many changes they feel will benefit their communities, as well as innovative ways

147

to begin addressing these needs. Raw comments relevant to this policy are cited in Appendix F.

Background: In accordance with the strength-based approach to social welfare, by which people are empowered through a focus on whatever strengths they may have rather than effectively disabled by a focus on weaknesses, such an educational paradigm allows students to "engage in learning about the place where they live and ways to preserve and sustain the *best* qualities of that place" (Sangre de Cristo Community and Schools Consortium, as cited in Parker and Colchado, 2003, p. 57). This education is grounded in the idea that every community is important and has valuable resources for students to both learn from and contribute to. Through this process, students may also play an active role in contributing to positive developments that enhance the future of their community and create a positive sense of self-efficacy among the youth themselves.

Stepping back, the student alienation that this policy seeks to overcome manifests itself in four major characteristics: powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation/estrangement (Brown, 2003). When interviewed about reasons for dropping out, one out of four youth surveyed said that "they did not belong" in school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). If students believe that there is little they can personally do to influence their future in school, they disengage from the schooling process (Brown, 2003)—quite opposite to our goal of increasing student engagement with school and community. Though they may have ideas for how school could be improved, these students may feel it is useless to share their negative perceptions about the school or their positive ideas for improvement (Brown, 2003).

In contrast, focusing on the importance of student voice highlights ways in which young people can learn democratic principles by sharing their opinions and working to improve school conditions for themselves and others (Mitra & Gross, 2009). Given this, in his focus on the connection between this sense of belonging and engagement, Finn (1993) proposes that the highest level of engagement of youth in school is that which actively promotes student participation in important aspects of school governance, and especially those that have a concrete impact on the students daily realities (for example, academic goals, discipline policies, etc.). As students contribute to these positive developments, they come to see that they can actively influence their own reality, and thus begin to simultaneously engage in multidisciplinary learning throughout a wide variety of subjects (Finn, 1993). This same paradigm can be expanded from the school to community level.

Building upon this, Smith (2002) describes a real-world problem-solving method for engaging students in the identification of school and/or community issues that they would like to investigate and address. In this, students play a key role in identifying the problems, selecting one as a class focus, studying its nuances, developing potential solutions, and actively organizing and participating in its remediation (Smith, 2002). With this in mind, the Youth Visioning aspect of the Rural Visioning Project can, in itself, be interpreted as an example of the beginning stages of such an educational process, serving as a platform from which students can delve deeper into wider community issues or more specifically into one aspect of community that they themselves have identified as important—taking action to make it better.

Problem-based learning, upon which such an approach is predicated, is a comprehensive system that encourages study and investigation within a real context, and is "based on the assumption that knowledge arises from work with an authentic problem" (Grabinger & Dunlap, 2002, p. 375). This gives rise to several benefits: encouraging the growth of student engagement and responsibility, decision making, and intentional learning; cultivating collaboration between students and teachers; engaging in dynamic, interdisciplinary learning activities that promote higher-order thinking processes; and, assessing student progress in content and "learning-to-learn" using practical tasks and performance indicators (Grabinger & Dunlap, 2002). In this, "Learning is not recall; learning is that active use of ideas to solve problems" (Elmore, 1989, p. 14).

This type of learning is typically highly valued by students. In <u>Living Between the Lines</u> (1991), Lucy Calkins provides an educator's perspective on the role of active learning grounded in the local context:

> If we asked our students for the highlight of their school careers, most would choose a time when they dedicated themselves to an endeavor of great importance... I am thinking of youngsters from P.S. 321, who have launched a save-the-tree campaign to prevent the oaks outside their school from being cut down... On projects such as these, youngsters will work before school, after school, during lunch. Our youngsters want to work hard on endeavors they deem significant.

In this, the last sentence is perhaps key. As educators and education professionals, then, the challenge becomes taking these endeavors that youth themselves deem significant and turning them into vehicles for academic and social learning.

Curricular frameworks have been developed and implemented for this type of learning. The Southern Rural Development Center (1996, p. i) sets

forth a comprehensive approach designed to link community organizations and students at the local high school in a community development process involving three phases:

1. Improving youth understanding of their community and how it works through several hands-on activities;

2. Conducting a needs assessment survey of community residents; and

3. Implementing a project to address a community issue identified through the needs assessment.

The culmination of five years of work, the resulting 356 page handbook was developed "so that other communities can work to mobilize their youth as partners in community development projects" (Israel & Ilvento, 1996, para. 1).

The Youth Community Action (YCA) curriculum, a signature approach of Cornell Cooperative Extension and New York State 4-H Youth Development (NYS 4-H), provides a similar framework by which youth can take action in their communities. YCA emphasizes the potential of youth-adult partnerships to ultimately increase youth leadership, through a framework which focuses on the interrelationship between education, community service, service learning, and community development (NYS 4-H, 2007). Figure 4.1, from the New York State 4-H Youth Development Office (2008), provides a visual depiction of this relationship. In fact, the very term Youth Community Action was coined by youth (NYS 4-H, 2007)—a testament to the youth focus of this particular curriculum!
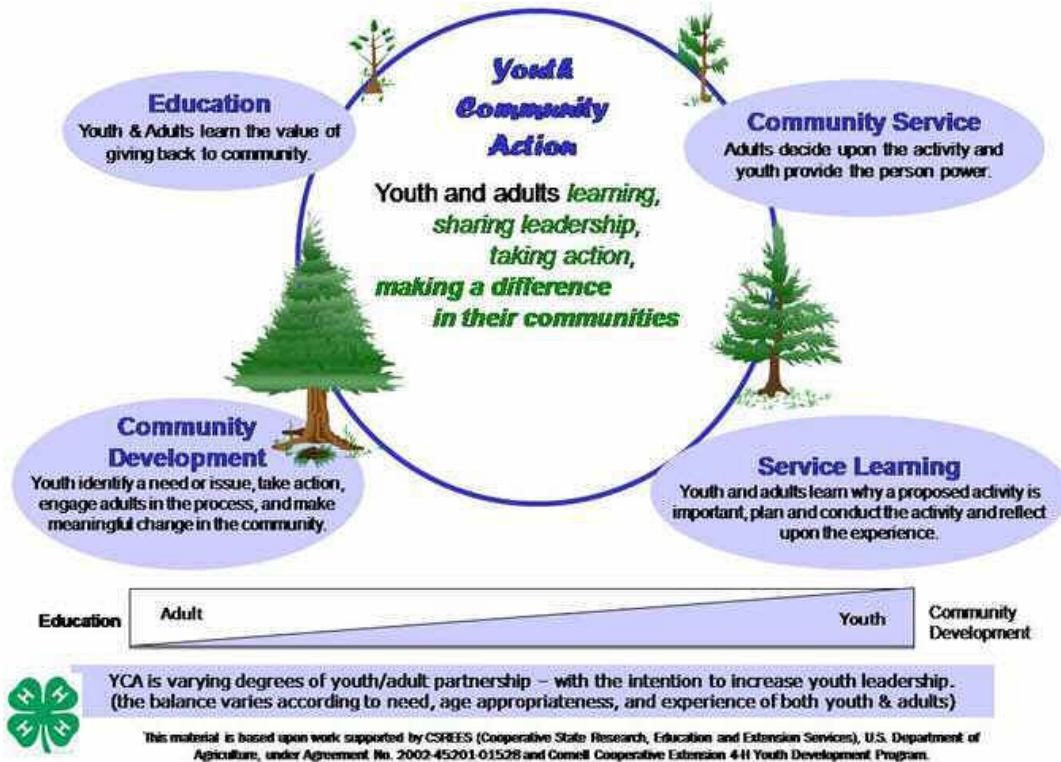
Figure 4.1: Youth Community Action Continuum. Reprinted from New York State 4-H Youth Development. (2008). *Lifecycle of Youth Community Action: An integral component of positive youth development.* Cornell Cooperative Extension. Retrieved from http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu/program/images/YCACircle Handout08FINAL.jpg

If rural communities are to achieve a strong and vibrant future, this suggests that they need to begin tapping into the strong potential for youth visioning and action—and, indeed, some communities already are.

1. From a historical perspective, a National Education Association Educational Policies Commission report from 1940 contains numerous examples of students collectively taking direct action to solve community problems, from a student housing survey and discussions with landlords about improving housing conditions in

urban East Harlem to a student-run and organized community center in a rural school in Ypsilanti, Michigan (as cited in Engel, 2000, p. 205).

2. The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development (LGCRD), located in Elsa, Texas, is a non-profit education and community development organization that was founded in the mid-1990s by youth and teachers out of a public high school classroom in this rural South Texas community (Guajardo et al., 2006). Students from the Llano Grande Center collaborate with Elsa's city council, manager, and mayor to publish a bilingual community newsletter, with the goal of keeping residents informed of progress on city projects and community development news (What Kids Can Do [WKCD], n.d.).

3. In Howard, South Dakota, relating community viability to economics, students conducted a cash flow study and economic survey of their community—bringing to light the fact that if residents spent an additional 15 percent of their income within the community, the community could once again become healthy economically, and generating an initial influx of between $6 million and $7 million into the local economy (Long et al., 2003). A year after this initial review, county auditors found that students had surpassed their goal nearly three times over: a 27 percent increase in local spending had yielded 15 million new dollars in revenue (WKCD, n.d., Building a Community's Vision section, para. 3).

4. In New York State, students in the West Valley Central School District in rural Cattaraugus County identified the need for a safe

and positive environment for students to go after school. In response to this, youth created an action plan, and, through the creation of successful youth-adult partnerships, successfully opened the Meet and Eat Corner Café—a place in the school itself where students can go after school hours to eat healthy food, do homework, and spend time with friends and mentors (New York State 4-H Youth Development, 2005).

As these examples demonstrate, this type of education paradigm represents one way to empower youth to take more of a role in the decision making process—on both an educational and community development level.

Actively engaging youth in these community development issues calls attention to the normative goals of education as a tool for citizenship, community health and viability, and social cohesiveness. In this sense, education is construed broadly as a means to connect students to larger purposes, including personal development, ethical decision-making, and committed participation in democratic civic life, preparing them to take their place in the civic culture so vital to the improvement of society (Gibbs & Howley, 2000; Cooper, Fusarelli, and Randall, 2004). Viewed through this lens, education becomes about giving children roots to a particular place that they can call home, through which they learn to become connected to and invested in the overarching idea of sustainable communities and democratic participation (Poore 1997).

The Center for Civic Education (1994) asserts that students who have had opportunities to participate directly in this democratic process feel more politically effective than most adults (cited in Boss, 1999). Through use of a self-efficacy scale as pre- and post-measures, Dunlap (2005) suggests that

several specific instructional strategies inherent to projects like those listed above—namely the use of authentic problems of practice, collaboration, and reflection in problem-based learning—do indeed increase student levels of self-efficacy.

Such active and thoughtful participation is widely acknowledged as essential to developing citizenship, a necessary ingredient in democracy. After all, youth best prepare for adult civic responsibility by practicing it within the world around them (Boss, 1999). Through this educational paradigm, in which students are actively engaged in all aspects of community and come to understand their own role in making the community a better place, students learn an essential civic lesson: "to learn how to create—not just observe—social change" (Engel, 2000, p. 206).

4.3 The Intersection of Local and State Standards

In examining the multiple dimensions of a learning environment which integrates school and community, as one type of differentiated educational paradigm, it appears that this strategy clearly appears to be valued as a tool for promoting rural community viability and active citizenship-- both by citizen participants in the Rural Visioning Project and throughout academic literature. Although "education is all about making meaning, which necessarily involves intellectual processes of greater sophistication than those typically assessed by state-mandated tests" (Gibbs & Howley, 2000, p. 2), it is increasingly the case that state-mandated high-stakes testing has come to be the norm of educational assessment. Because, as Gibbs & Howley (2000) assert, advocates of this active and community-

centered educational paradigm differ markedly from proponents of standards-based reform, and are often among the most outspoken critics of such reform, one comes to wonder whether the two can support one another, or even peacefully co-exist.

In general, Listening Session comments suggest a rather negative perception of New York's Regents standards and national standards brought on under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2000. To a large extent, negative comments regarding the current state of rural schools and rural education reflect the perception that the present focus on NYS Regents examinations and national standards has resulted in an educational system that focuses on standardized tests at the expense of more functional and flexible learning. Representative RVP comments include:

> Regents rules do not serve students well, only increase stress – teaching for the test and too much funneling and standardizing – not teaching "how to learn"; Eliminate Regents Program in NY—conflict between localized education and state level rules (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)
>
> Mismatch between skill sets taught in high-school and those needed for college preparation; Regents education may help some kids graduate, but isn't tied to workforce development – the redesigned system is destructive. The system only teaches for the test (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006
>
> Regent system "broken." Mismatch between expectations of Regent system and the direction rural youth should take (Van Etten, NY 12/16/2005)

Too many standards for testing – limits time, flexibility, ability to approach new subjects, ideas, and build skills (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Too much pressure to "teach for the test" – leaves little time to expand and experience outside classroom; Reduce the number of standardized tests, or eliminate current testing methods (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

If testing standards are too rigid, they can't adapt and shift to changing economy and workforce needs (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006)

In spite of such comments, given the current national climate, it is clear that standards-based reform is not going to disappear any time soon— nor is it within the realm of this study to analyze whether reliance on such standards are a positive or negative force in the educational arena. Such an evaluation would necessitate another study entirely. Suffice to say, an extensive amount of academic research and literature debates the theoretical and academic merits of this standards-based reform, with no single clear answer emerging.

We can, nonetheless, examine whether the community-centered education outlined in the above policy recommendations, as an alternative to the "teaching to the test" form of education often criticized by RVP participants, has proven potential to meet these already established and institutionalized academic standards.

Within the standards framework, the Annenburg Rural Challenge, a non-profit foundation established in 1995 specifically to promote public school reform in rural America, encourages the development of three broad

types of learning standards: a) content standards that establish what the community expects children to accomplish and are high enough to be challenging, b) context standards that root curriculum within a local context and use community and environment as a tool for achieving content standards, and c) learning-condition standards that ensure appropriate learning conditions (Rural Challenge, 1998, pp. 3-4). The Rural Challenge (1998, p.1) fundamentally recognizes that "setting high academic standards and achieving against them is an important educational objective," while simultaneously pushing the envelope with the question "Can high standards be set and met for all without standardized curricula?" (1999, p. 5).

Given this, as Martin Saulsberry, a student from Delta High School and a participant in the 1999 Annenberg Rural Challenge conference, asks "If the standards the community has formed are not the standards that allow us to compete with the schools of the nation, are those standards really working for the school?" (Rural Challenge, 1999, p. 4) From a practical sense, this is perhaps the most immediate consideration that any given school faces in implementing any educational program. Returning to Spitzer's challenge set forth in the 2007 State of the State Address, have these policies been "proven to work" at meeting these assessment-based standards?

From a historical perspective, Dewey (1916) again suggests that formal school learning is most effective when it is situated within the real-world environment of a community.

> When the schools depart from the educational conditions effective in the out-of-school environment, they necessarily substitute a bookish, a pseudo-intellectual spirit for a social spirit…it has yet to be proved that learning occurs most adequately when it is made a separate

conscious business (pp. 38-9).

The question then becomes whether, based on standards and other formal measures of learning, it can be proven that learning occurs most adequately when it is consciously *not* made a separate business—but rather is integrated within the community context. *What evidence is there that such an educational philosophy can both reduce alienation and meet current academic standards?*

In reality, state standards and local curriculum, far from being a "zero-sum game," actually may be mutually supportive (Jennings, 2000, p. 194). Examining four schools in rural Maine, in towns with populations less than 5,000 people, Jennings finds that standards act to both "marginalize" (p. 196) and "reinforce" (p.197) community-centered curriculum, reaching the conclusion that "rural educators can manipulate state standards to achieve their local goals but it is not easy work" (p.201). Time, leadership, the ability to focus energy, and the opportunity and willingness for sustained dialogue are all essential ingredients if such a program is to succeed within both the community and standards frameworks (Jennings, 2000).

In fact, after conducting a comprehensive review of the literature on rural school reform, including the potential of community-centered education, Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) conclude that, the "major problem in the sphere of education policy and research today is that there is…very little debate taking place between rural education advocates and leaders of mainstream state and national reform movements, (and) not that their actual school reform strategies are so different" (p. 76).

The fact that many national standard reports are themselves emphasizing goals that relate the core curriculum courses to life outside of school adds additional credibility to this idea (Yager, 2003). In her critical

analysis of standards, Nel Noddings (1997) suggests that "If we are serious about raising standards, we have to help students understand what standards are and how they are related to the students' own purposes" (p.187-8). And, indeed, it seems that this comprehensive perspective is indeed beginning to be recognized by formal institutions. An increasing number of national and state standards and learning goals themselves, distributed through a range of academic disciplines, are focused on establishing this linkage with student reality.

For example, the National Science Education Standards (NAS, 1996) sets forth four goals for "scientific literacy" that call for educating students who are able to:

> 1) experience the richness and excitement of knowing about and understanding the natural world; 2) use appropriate scientific processes and principles in making personal decisions; 3) engage intelligently in public discourse and debate about matters of scientific and technological concern; and 4) and increase their economic productivity through the use of the knowledge, understanding, and skills of the scientifically literate person in their careers. (p.13)

These four goals for scientific literacy correspond to the policy recommendations that emerged from the Rural Visioning Project, encouraging students to take part in active learning and intelligent engagement with the world around them, and ultimately relating to thoughtful community participation and productive employment. In this, more than mere memorization and application of scientific formulas, community-centered science education, with its emphasis on real-world application and engagement within the community, seems to fall directly in line with such scientific literacy goals.

Certain New York State standards established by the Board of Regents also seem especially conducive to such experiential learning modules. The Career Development and Occupational Studies framework immediately calls to mind the potential for community-based and hands-on curricula. *Integrated Learning* requires students to "demonstrate how academic knowledge and skills are applied in the workplace and other settings" (New York State Academy for Teaching and Learning [NYSATL], n.d. a, Standard 2). In the Social Studies framework, *Civics, Citizenship, and Government* calls for students to demonstrate an understanding of "roles, rights, and responsibilities of citizenship, including avenues of participation" (NYSATL, n.d. b, Standard 5). Further, the realm of Family and Consumer Sciences, necessitates that students "understand and be able to manage their personal and community resources" (NYSATL, n.d. c, Standard 3).

Standards such as these emphasize practical application of academics, and encourage student participation in the broader community in terms of both workforce and citizenship development. Taken together, various standards dispersed throughout a range of subject matters suggest that the time is right for integrating school and community in New York State. According to the New York State Academy for Teaching and Learning (NYSATL, n.d. d), "these learning standards are to form the basis for a re-vision of education in New York" (para. 1).

Given that national learning goals and state standards such as these appear supportive of learning that integrates school and community, we can now turn to an examination of how such an educational paradigm affects student learning and achievement, as currently measured within the context of accountability. While these standards, and many more throughout other

disciplines, certainly appear congruent with an active learning paradigm that integrates school and community, what does student performance say?

A number of studies from across the United States, do, in fact, quantitatively connect place-based education with the specific goal of student academic achievement. Many of these focus specifically on environmental education as means of integrating school and community, given that this remains the most widely practiced form of place-based education.

1. In partnership with 12 State Departments of Education, the State Education and Environment Roundtable (SEER) sponsored an evaluation of students engaged in learning opportunities that used the Environment as an Integrating Context ™ (EIC). As part of this study, Lieberman and Hoody (1998) compared EIC students in 14 schools with students in traditional classrooms on measurements such as standardized tests, grade point averages, attendance, student-attitude measurements, and disciplinary action records. Results showed that students in the community-centered programs achieved higher scores on standardized measures of academic achievement in reading, writing, math, science, and social studies; reduced discipline and classroom management problems; increased engagement and enthusiasm for learning; and greater pride and ownership in their accomplishment. (Lieberman & Hoody, 1998)

2. The Beebe School in Malden, Massachusetts, an Environmental and Health Science magnet school which uses local resources to integrate those sciences into the curriculum, has used the place-

based education model since 1999. Since 2000, Beebe students have outpaced their peers in the school district on MCAS tests in math and science, suggesting a correlation between community-centered education and academic performance. (Program Evaluation and Educational Research [PEER] Associates, Inc., 2006)

3. In a comprehensive review of *Environment as Integrating Context* ™ (EIC) work with 13 schools throughout the state of Florida, Abrams (1999) reports that the implementation of the EIC Model translates into higher scores on state reading, writing, and mathematics assessment tests. Some of the most striking examples from this research include: Alva Elementary, where 71% percent of fourth graders met or exceeded District standards on Florida Writes! expository writing in 1999 compared to 48% in 1998, and on narrative writing, 84% in 1999 compared to 47% in 1998; Belleview Elementary, where 91% of eighth graders met or exceeded a rating of 3 on Florida Writes! in 1999 compared to 77% in 1998; and Eastside Elementary-On FCAT Reading, 51% of the fourth graders achieved Level 3 in 1999 compared to 46% in 1998, and met the state's higher performing criteria in 1999.

4. In an unpublished Master's Thesis, Danforth (2005) compares data from three pairs of Houston schools, matched by demographics. Comparing 306 4th grade students whose teachers were implementing NWF's Schoolyard Habitat Program (SYH) with a control group consisting of 108 4th grade students whose teachers used a more traditional curriculum, results showed that SYH

students increased their Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills math scores significantly more than peers with a traditional curriculum. Although reading scores were actually slightly negatively correlated with SYH participation, the author argues that this simply reflects the fact that the curriculum was more directly connected to math than reading. (Danforth, as cited in PEEC, 2005)

5. In an unpublished master's thesis available through the Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative, Bartosh (2004) compares 77 pairs of demographically equivalent schools from throughout Washington State. Each matched pair consisted of one school with fully-implemented environmental education (EE) throughout the grades and curriculum and a matching school without EE. According to the results, schools with place-based EE programs consistently showed higher test scores on state standardized tests in math, reading and writing. There were no EE schools that had lower percentage of students who met or were above standards in all six areas. Overall, 73 pairs out of 77 EE schools had higher scores in at least one subject, with no EE schools having a lower percentage of students meeting or exceeding standards than non-EE schools (Bartosh, 2004). Students in these programs tended to improve their overall GPA, stay in school longer, receive higher than average scholarship awards, and display more responsible behavior in their school and community (Bartosh, as cited in PEEC, n.d.). Based on this,

164

Bartosh (2004) concludes that place-based environmental education "improves student learning" (p. 128).

6. The Community-based School Environmental Education (Project CO-SEED) initiative compiles comprehensive evaluation reports for all of its place-based education projects, from 1998 to 2008 (PEEC, 2008b). Several of these evaluations focus on test-score impacts as a quantitative measure of student achievement, with "positive, but inconsistent" results (PEER Associates, 2007a, slide 21). The CO-SEED program at Haley Elementary School in Roslindale, MA is representative of the challenges often faced by attempts to directly relate place-based educational programs to analysis of standardized test scores. Increases in test scores at this site were not found to be generalizable or consistently associated with cohort, subject level, or other activities that could be unambiguously attributed to CO-SEED or related place-based education efforts (PEER Associates, 2007). Given this, the best conclusion that can be drawn is that "the body of quantitative data from the Haley (and in aggregate with other CO-SEED sites) clearly indicates that CO-SEED and related place-based education efforts *do not compromise MCAS scores* as they generate strong reports of achieving several other educational and professional outcomes" (PEER Associates, 2007b, para. 4).

Although not irrefutably conclusive, the above examples are at least suggestive of a correlation between the practice of community-centered education and increased student academic achievement as measured by the institutionalized standard of test scores. Examples such as these allow us to

point to the *potential* for community-based education at meeting and even exceeding these standards, providing a starting point in the policy dialogue, while looking forward to more comprehensive long-term studies of its impacts.

Given that solid information and data clearly increase the effectiveness of policy suggestions, it remains important to recognize that data do not always present themselves as statistics or numbers and may take more qualitative forms such as those deriving from interviews and document analysis (Miller, 1995). To date, although there have been quantitative measurements done in several case studies, evidence regarding the effectiveness of any educational practice at meeting state academic standards remains largely anecdotal given the recent nature of the state standards movement. In examining the impacts of community-centered education, it can be argued that qualitative measurements obtained through means such as surveys and interviews perhaps have equal merit with quantitative measurements—for they suggest the merits of changes in the learning process and the way in which students learn, and provide a more adequate forum for students to express the ways (if at all) in which their own educational experiences have been transformed through this education.

If the goal is to enhance student engagement and learning as well as reduce student alienation, both qualitative and quantitative measures may be useful in determining the effectiveness of this type of academic program. Three representative case studies prove useful in assessing both the qualitative and quantitative merits of education that actively engages students with community. These case studies were chosen because they exemplify the diverse forms that community-based education may take and offer unique

166

firsthand accounts of the programs and their effects on student engagement and overall learning.

In these studies, student performance and alienation are measured by test scores, drop-out rates, and firsthand accounts—which may be compared before and after a community-centered educational program was implemented. Regardless of how one may feel about standardized measures of accountability like test scores and drop-out rates, the fact remains that these statistics remain the current reality of education. As such, when combined with the first-hand student insights and anecdotal observations, these indicators play an important role in telling us how the system is functioning.

4.3.1 Case Study One: Delta Five Cluster, Mississippi Delta (King, 2003)

A brief case study of the Delta Five Cluster, a collaboration of five rural Mississippi Delta school districts that developed a place-based program integrating local culture, teaching, and writing, demonstrates the impact of place-based learning both on personal student development and on actual test scores. It is important to realize that in this district, where eighty-two percent of students are non-Caucasian and almost ninety percent qualify for free or reduced-fee lunches, every student can be classified as "at-risk" and "vulnerable." The place-based learning program involved students of various ages in such projects as developing Delta products and recipe books, compiling oral histories, creating painted bird houses in folk tradition, making radio tapes and Power Point presentations. All of these products and

outcomes were exhibited at a cultural fair at the end of the school year, which was attended by students, teachers, administrators, and community members.

In terms of student development, numerous teachers and administrators associated with the schools in the district cited the role of this place-based learning project in instilling in children a sense of hope and pride in Delta culture. Speaking of a group of fifth and sixth grade boys, Wendy McCurtis, consultant to the project, said, "My most positive experience was working with my little Leland [school district] boys and noticing the changes in them from being involved with place-based learning. They called themselves the 6-8-6 boys [representing their telephone exchange]." Similar increases in self-esteem were anecdotally suggested throughout the project.

Quantitative data for the Mississippi Writing Assessment (MWA) are supportive of the improved academic performance of students involved in place-based learning. Data available for the Shaw and Hollandale school districts of the Delta Five Cluster enable the comparison of scores from before and after place-based learning was implemented. The MWA, which is administered to assess writing achievement among students in the fourth and seventh grades, is scored on a scale of 0 to 4, with 0 being lowest and 4 being highest. In the Shaw district, for example, in the school year 1999-2000, before the first year of place-based learning, only 18% of students scored in the top two brackets: 17% of students scored 3 and 1% scored 4. In 2001-2002, however, the first full year of place-based learning in the Shaw district, fully 46% of students scored in these two highest brackets of assessment: 32% of students scored 3 and 14% scored 4. The number of

students scoring 1 for school year 1999-2000 compared to 2001-2002 decreased substantially from 21% to 2%. This tremendous gain in writing assessment scores over the two-year period during which place-based learning was implemented is repeated across both school districts in the study—suggesting that the place-based education program did indeed provide students with the academic skills needed to improve their standard-based performance.

4.3.2 Case Study Two: Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, Rural Alaska (Loveland, 2003)

Since its inception in 1995, the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (AKRSI) has been involved in quantitatively documenting student achievement in its place-based education efforts. Central to their mission is the creation of curricula that integrate indigenous and Western cultures, while also providing evidence for student assessment. Collaborating with 20 out of the 48 rural school districts in Alaska and all five native tribes, they have implemented their mission of "systematically document[ing] the indigenous knowledge systems of Alaska Native people and develop[ing] educational policies and practices that effectively integrate indigenous and Western knowledge through a renewed educational system." Students participate in Native Science Fairs and create Cultural Atlases, multimedia presentations that result from students interviewing community Elders, researching available documents related to indigenous knowledge systems, and participating with Elders in subsistence camps to learn about traditional activities. AKRSI is also developing specialized math and science curricula

with Elders and teachers that relate the teaching of math and science to the surrounding environment.

AKRSI has documented eighth grade scores on the California Achievement Tests, one of the nation's most popular assessments of reading, language, spelling, mathematics, science, and social studies, over the course of four years. Consistently, schools using place-based education have demonstrated a gain in scores over schools that do not use such a curriculum. AKRSI districts now have 24.3% of their students performing in the upper quartile of the CAT-5 math tests—which is roughly equivalent to (less than one percentage point below) the national average. Without numerical data as to how these schools scored before the implementation of place-based learning, it is impossible to gauge the exact impact that the new program has had—but with the knowledge that these schools perform roughly at the national average now, it would certainly appear as though they have not been harmed.

This case study suggests that the most striking example of academic gains through the implementation of AKRSI's place-based curriculum occurred at the Russian Mission School, which, in 2000, had the lowest test scores in its district and a startling one-third of children between the ages of 12 and 16 not attending school. In contrast, by 2003, after the implementation of an intensive curriculum developed around the traditional Native subsistence activities of each season, every local school-age child was attending the school. Test scores had risen to the point where all of the school's third graders received the highest scores statewide on the Alaska Benchmark test for third grade, and anecdotal evidence suggests that some kids raised their reading level by more than a year in just five months after

170

curriculum extended into the classroom where students would read and write about local history. Principal Mike Hull attributes this change to place-based education, which he says has resulted in a "tremendous" change in attitude about schooling among students in the middle grades

Thus, in this situation, the implementation of community-centered, and specifically culturally grounded, curriculum seems to have prompted student interest in learning—as demonstrated by the change in attitude and the increased attendance rates—while simultaneously maintaining, and potentially even improving, academic performance measured through various standards.

4.3.3 Case Study Three: Lubec, Maine (Hynes, 2003)

The case study from Lubec, Maine, a small town on Cobscook Bay, which has historically been dependent on the sea, with many residents working as lobster fishermen, scallop draggers, clam diggers, or fish packers, underscores the potential merger between community-centered and vocational education. The percentage of families living in poverty in Lubec (20%) is nearly twice the state average for Maine, and the sparsely populated county in which the community is located has only 13 people per square mile. In the 1990s, this county had the lowest level of educational attainment in the state. Students in this community are thus isolated by both poverty and distance.

Looking for ways to revitalize its struggling economy and engage its youth in education and the community, Lubec established Maine's only vocational aquaculture program. In 2002, students raised tilapia (a popular

type of farm-raised fish), maintained a hydroponic greenhouse that recycled wastewater from the fish tanks, farmed mussels, and sold bait to local fishermen. Students in the local area also collected data for a local conservation and resource management agency, which will be used to make lasting decisions about land and buildings around the region. The goal, according to Brian Leavitt, the program's teacher, is "to keep kids in school, keep them engaged, keep them interested, provide the best education we can, take advantage of the way they learn best." Although he makes no specific mention of assessment-based standards, all of these goals certainly relate to learning in a most essential sense.

To date, evidence of the program's results remain largely anecdotal. Initial observations suggest that for the students it serves, the program is reducing dropout rates and increasing attendance. Leavitt mentions several students who were "the most rambunctious students I ever had" or another who previously had "been absent more times than he [had] been here," who now are interested and engaged in their work. Debbie Jamieson, a teacher who was instrumental in initiating the aquaculture program, echoes this proud sentiment, specifically saying that some of the kids who have now graduated most definitely would have dropped out of school without this place-based program. She states, "It was because they could spend three or four hours a day doing something with their hands, that made sense…and not sit in a traditional classroom. If they had had to sit in a traditional classroom, they would not have come to school." Providing a real context for learning thus appears to have served as the motivation for school attendance.

The place-based aquaculture program has also changed the climate for learning, with Leavitt mentioning that he now "[sees] the lower level student helping the upper level student…We do math and English and reading out there [in the aquaculture center] but it's a different approach." Developmentally and academically, this can help foster a new sense of self-esteem among students who previously were not marked as high-achievers in a traditional setting.

Moreover, the program seems to be serving an instrumental role in raising students' aspirations and encouraging them to set goals for school and beyond, by, as Jamieson puts it, "open[ing] their eyes." Students have taken the initiative to attempt to raise enough money to make this program self-sustaining, representing skills not only in terms of entrepreneurship, but also in terms of commitment and responsibility.

As another teacher in the district reflects, "I think the success of [the community- based program] is that [students] see it as being very relevant. They are doing tasks that people are being paid to do here in this town…With students who aren't that academically inclined, they are always grasping for why am I doing this, why am I doing this. With the aquaculture program, they see directly why." In this, Lubec serves as an example of how place-based education can provide innovative new options for students who have not been successful in traditional school settings and functionally reduce alienation from both school and community.

4.3.4 Conclusion

In all three of these case studies, the implementation of community-centered curricula, with its corresponding integration of youth and community, appears to have reduced student alienation while, for all intents and purposes, simultaneously meeting or exceeding state curricular standards. From cultural to vocational initiatives, the teachers and students involved express signs of greater youth connection to, investment in, and satisfaction with academics and community. Although certainly not irrefutably conclusive, quantitative data on test scores and drop-out rates for these schools also appear to support the conclusion that place-based education has a key role to play in engaging students with their studies, thereby reducing the alienation problem and simultaneously improving, or at least maintaining, academic performance.

Ultimately, Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) assert that, in actuality, the dichotomy between state standards and community-centered curriculum may be more a product of what policymakers have made it than actual educational processes and final outcomes. As they explain:

> So the student working on a Foxfire-like journal under systemic reform may be undertaking this type of work to strengthen her research, analytical, and writing skills which may one day be applied by this same student working for an information-age corporation. A student doing the same work under one of the various rural education improvement projects mentioned earlier seemingly is doing so to strengthen her own knowledge of and ties to the local community, and to strengthen the local community itself. The real difference between these two students and what they are learning, of course, may lie more in the minds of education policymakers and researchers; not in what the students, the community, or the nation actually gain from

the experience. Are these two movements diametrically opposed at the student level? Probably not. (p. 76)

As demonstrated by the rural improvement projects cited throughout this section, evidence suggests that education which integrates school and community, is not, in itself, antithetical to state and national learning goals and standards. Numerous interviews and surveys cited throughout the course of this document lead to the conclusion that, at the student level, this educational paradigm may even enhance these institutionalized standards by engaging a greater proportion of students with schools and learning. If students are alienated by the traditional curriculum to the point where they are not even attending school, for example, all the standards in the world—despite the best intentions—will not get very far unless we first increase student motivation. Community-centered education, as part of a differentiated educational strategy, certainly has the potential to play a key role in this.

4.4 Practical Applications

While the above analysis suggests that the integration of school and community, as through the five policies described, appears to have concrete academic benefits for youth and developmental benefits for both youth and communities, it also must be remembered that these policies are not a magical panacea for the ailing rural school system. In the world of high-stakes testing, where everyday realities of limited time and funding contribute to an intense pressure to "teach for the test," educational policies that take learning outside of textbooks and into the community may seem

counterintuitive—a longer, more involved road than the simple memorization of facts and theories.

Recognizing the complex nature of the state-local-school relationship in any attempt to reform school curricula (Engel, 2000) and the reality that states retain the fundamental Constitutional responsibility for education (Collins, 1999), the aforementioned policies are not meant to suggest the sole value of the local at the expense of the state and national. Rather, policies that seek to revitalize the school-community interface, with the goal of reducing student alienation and increasing engagement, require the interplay of state and local forces. As Wilson and Rossman (1993) suggest, the state must "move away from the mandated change of the first wave of reform and embrace a strategy of capacity-building and system changing that makes the state, local districts, and schools partners in experimentation and innovation" (p. 203). To accomplish this, they outline a model by which the state would maintain an active role, by providing training and technical assistance, encouraging and facilitating local innovation, and leading the way to restructured schools through partnership rather than standardized mandates (Wilson & Rossman, 1993). In the drive for systemic reform which attempts to increase school accountability by demanding meaningful community engagement, policies must bring together various agencies, groups, and individuals at all levels, with a focus on the community working in concert with state and federal agencies (Collins, 1999).

If we ever hope to benefit rural students by changing the ailing rural educational establishment, however, there remains a fundamental need for compromise—from all sides (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999). In broad terms, flexibility is key. While proponents of generic school reform and

standardization must recognize that their existing "accountability systems without such flexibility are flawed at best," rural school reformers need to relinquish some of their ideas of rebuilding nostalgic schools of the past and instead focus on how to create the rural schools and communities of the future (Kannapel &DeYoung, 1999, p. 77). This will not be achieved unless national education reformers and rural education advocates come together to engage in productive dialogue about how their goals—respectively, state learning standards and rural community vitality—may be simultaneously achieved.

As an example of what this may look like in practice, the state of California recently mandated the state-wide Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI), requiring the implementation of environment-based instruction in K-12 schools throughout the state (California Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 2010a). Citing evidence from a growing number of national studies that suggest that achievement increases when students learn academic content standards in an environmental context, the California Environmental Protection Agency (2006) asserts that "these connections help students understand how learning can be relevant to their daily lives and their communities, a significant motivating factor in the learning process" (Why EEI section, Answer 2).

The corresponding EEI Curriculum, consisting of 85 curriculum units spanning grades K-12, aligns with the State Board of Education's adopted academic content standards for science, mathematics, English Language arts, and history/social science (EPA, 2006; California Department of Education, 2009). In order to ensure that the curriculum meets the highest academic standards, the California EPA (2009) reports that it is currently undergoing a

thorough review by Content Review Experts and Instructional Materials Reviewers approved by the State Board of Education, and will be reviewed by the Curriculum Development & Supplemental Materials Commission, and, ultimately, the State Board of Education, before final implementation. An Educator Needs Assessment, distributed to 10,000 teachers, and numerous focus group meetings and discussion sessions provided an additional means of gathering information regarding design elements for the EEI Curriculum in order to ensure its effectiveness (EPA, 2010b). In addition, the entire draft curriculum is posted on the California Environmental Protection Agency website for public review, and is viewable at http://www.calepa.ca.gov/Education/EEI/Curriculum/Default.htm.

Recognizing the complementary nature of standards-based curriculum and community-centered education, this curriculum is thus designed to provide teachers with

> an alternative strategy for using their adopted instructional materials in a way that engages students by using the environment as a context for standards-based instruction. EEI units are being designed to teach standards to mastery through instructional strategies that many students may find more engaging than traditional materials. (EPA, 2006, Background section, Answer 2).

By using the environmental community context to make learning relevant to today's world, this program seeks to engage students with the academic material presented in content standards, encouraging them to develop into "knowledgeable citizens who can make informed decisions about California's future" (EPA, 2006, Why EEI section, Answer 1). Given that 76 of the EEI Curriculum units were approved by the State Board of

Education on January 6, 2010 (EPA, 2010b), this initiative certainly appears to be moving forward.

Based on their review of literature relevant to rural school reform, Kannapel and DeYoung (1999) assert that "using test scores or other artificial indices" to measure student learning hides the fact that "real accountability is found in community satisfaction with the schools, and in student ability to succeed after school in ways that are sustaining to themselves, the community, and society at large" (p. 77). This lofty statement raises important, and difficult, questions about assessment and the ways in which student learning is measured. How does one measure this "real accountability?" How, in reality, can one measure the ways in which students will succeed in bettering themselves, their communities, and society at large? Is it even possible to quantitatively measure the goal of learning how to learn? At the same time, however, a brief survey of literature turns up no scholar arguing that rural education should exist as a completely haphazard endeavor, with no means for gauging academic success.

Because experiential, community-centered education is thus less generalizable than traditional education, there remains a need for the development of more valid instruments for assessing the effects of such programs (Hamilton, 1980). Based on a review of several studies, Brown (2003) suggests the following questions that may be used to guide reflection on work-based learning programs, helping educators find ways to document student learning, and not simply rigid statistics related to retention, completion, and placement:

1. What is the purpose of the work-based learning experience, e.g., technical competence, professional artistry or both?

2. What types of tasks are students to perform and in what social context are they to be accomplished?
3. What are the objectives for work placements?
4. What training philosophy and practices will guide work-based learning?
5. What are the anticipated learning outcomes?
6. What are the assessment criteria and what evidence of learning is to be obtained? (pp. 5-6)

These questions are easily expanded to pertain to any learning that integrates school and community, not simply work-based learning.

Because all five of the policy approaches discussed in the above section represent a departure from the more traditional ways educators and community have viewed curriculum (ie, school- and textbook-centered learning), it is also important to remember that these programs frequently exist as isolated efforts within a larger school system (Miller, 1995). As such, there may be negative perceptions among traditional, content-focused teachers. For example, Miller (1995) describes a coastal studies program which engaged students in problem identification, research and reporting on community needs. Time spent in the community collecting data, however, was not viewed favorably by many other teachers in the school, who perhaps viewed this time as wasted because it was not spent in a classroom (Miller, 1995).

At the same time, it is possible that these same benefits of community-centered educational programs may apply in much the same way to teachers. Of all the teachers interviewed by Jennings (2000) throughout the course of her study, the place-based vocational teacher expressed the most enjoyment and satisfaction with his job. Based on evaluation of six place-based education programs representing 100 schools and the results of

more than 750 educator surveys, the Place Based Education Evaluation Collaborative (PEEC, 2008a) lists one of the primary benefits of community-centered education as its "energizing" effect on teachers (p. 3). Despite acknowledging that it can certainly be challenging at times, the educators surveyed report increased engagement, collaboration, and professional growth (Duffin, 2007, slide 10). This implies that rural districts which implement such innovative and flexible educational paradigms, or encourage faculty to do so, may have a unique advantage in teacher motivation.

To date, little research has focused on the effects of this educational policy on the teachers in whose classrooms it is implemented, focusing instead primarily on the outcomes for student motivation and achievement. With this in mind, means such as teacher surveys, interviews, and self-evaluations that focus on teacher response to such curriculum certainly have an important role to play in future analyses of this educational paradigm.

Framing the benefits of community-centered education within the more institutionalized academic standards perspective may help to overcome the ways in which these non-traditional programs may be stereotyped. Indeed, if they are to be successful, such educational programs must be grounded within an overall educational approach that includes conventional schooling (Hamilton, 1980). Education that integrates the school and community does not eliminate the need for classrooms– rather it changes the way such classrooms are used and the learning that occurs within their four walls. "The classroom becomes a place where students can connect their own immediate environment to the world at large, within the framework of conventional academic disciplines" (Engel, 2000, p. 202).

From a practical standpoint, therefore, the five aforementioned policies are not designed to replace conventional teaching and learning, but to supplement them as part of a paradigm of differentiated education. In this, the education of our youth is not an either-or proposition, but a matter of flexibility.

Certain attributes of community-centered educational programs have been documented as especially important to the success of any such program. In the implementation of a community-centered program, even considering that the program itself will vary along with the unique local context, it is certainly helpful to build off of the valuable knowledge base that already exists based on the experiences of programs that currently exist or have been completed. Table 4.1, reprinted from Miller (1995), lists the ten attributes most frequently mentioned as leading to successful community-based learning for students.

Table 4.1: Ten Attributes Leading to Successful Community-Based Learning for Students

Rank	Attribute	Description
1	Involve and empower students in all aspects of program or project	Students are viewed as important, contributing members of the community. Class time is scheduled so student involvement becomes part of the regular academic day. The community is made continuously aware of student contributions and the skills achieved by their involvement. Students of all ages are involved.
2	Develop broad-based support for the change	Local residents are involved in every step of change: project design, implementation, evaluation and revisions. This means including local experts, "nay sayers/ opposition," students, teachers, parents, economic development groups, political affiliations, various age groups, respected and effective leaders, administrators, local residents with historical roots, and advocates. The whole community needs to be informed for a support base to be developed.
3	Identify resources	Identify resources that exist locally. In other words, what are the assets we already have: students, grant writers, technology, individuals with interest and motivation and those who have access to information? Identify needed resources: funding/grants and consultants/outside expertise.
4	Develop a common vision	Develop a clear vision of where the project is going early on in the process, especially one that provides common ground across the diversity of the community. It is especially important that the school and community have a shared vision with buy-in from community, staff, and students. There should also be an ongoing assessment of the vision's appropriateness, with adjustments being made as necessary.

Table 4.1 (Continued)

5	Provide a structured process	There needs to be a clearly definable management structure to organize the community development process. Activities cannot be random. There must be a process to build vision, identify strengths and needs, set goals, create time to share, build commitment, learn group processes that provide for equitable sharing of ideas from across the community, and adequate planning. It was also suggested that hiring a project coordinator be considered.
6	Emphasize group process and team effort	Cooperation and consensus are necessary. They require creating a safe, positive meeting environment characterized by good group process. This means creating an open, honest dialogue among community members through training, team building, conflict resolution, sharing models, and visiting others who are successful.
7	Develop and maintaining community (students, residents, and educators) awareness of community strengths, needs, and projects	Develop a realistic picture of the conditions existing in the community that require action. Help residents become aware of the diverse resources that exist in students and helping students develop an understanding of the strengths and values of the community.
8	Identify and develop local leadership	Identify people in the community and school who have energy, push, and community credibility. They need to be able to communicate the shared vision. Forming a leadership team to help structure activities was suggested.
9	Celebrate accomplishments on an ongoing basis	Document and publicize the successes. Do this in a planned way. Make it part of the evaluation and assessment activities. Everyone should feel rewarded by their participation and efforts should lead to positive community change.

Table 4.1 (Continued)

| 10 | Create a productive, safe climate for change | Attend to building and sustaining positive relationships. Meetings should take place in a safe, positive environment where all ideas are honored, accepted, and processed. People need to feel it is okay to take risks and their needs to be motivation and buy-in for the change. |

Reprinted from Miller, B.A. (1995). *The role of rural schools in community development: Policy issues and implications*, pp. 168-169. Retrieved from http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/v11,n3, p163-172,Miller.pdf

These attributes, described by participants in an invitational symposium sponsored by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory on community-based learning experiences for rural youth, are based on two questions: "1) What contributed to the success of these community-based projects? 2) What recommendations are there for others considering community-based learning?" (Miller, 1995, p. 167) These interrelated attributes have been ranked by how frequently they were found in the data. The top two attributes focus on the critical importance of actively involving students and the local community in successful project design and implementation, themes that run throughout the five policy recommendations outlined above.

The third ranking attribute of successful community-based learning from Table 4.1 deals with resource identification, and suggests an important role for student and community involvement here as well. From a practical standpoint, schools and communities who are sufficiently invested in ideas of community-based learning will find a way to make their programs work. Similar to the "where there is a will, there is a way" theory of thought,

examples abound suggesting the potential for innovative funding sources for rural communities contemplating the implementation of these policies. From researching funding sources to writing and submitting grant applications and even raising the money themselves, students and other involved community members can take a leading role in obtaining resources necessary to implement a successful community-centered educational program.

Educators may be able to make effective use of this practical lesson, part of Policy 4, as a way to further facilitate youth ownership in educational and community development processes while simultaneously emphasizing a wide-range of academic applications. From developing research and writing skills to practicing public speaking and even applying principles of economics, the possibilities for applied learning are manifold.

Such a community-centered education may be viewed as playing an integral role in bridging the gap between youth and community—in essence tying together the first two sections of this report and providing a means for youth to actively engage with their communities through multidisciplinary explorations. As evidence for this approach, focusing on strategies that have demonstrated the most positive impacts on improving the high school graduation rates, Schargel and Smink (2001) emphasize the importance of "making the most of the wider community," through means such as linking with the wider community through systemic renewal, community collaboration, career education and school-to-work programs (p.43).

The implementation of such policies requires a deep commitment to the principles of community, youth engagement, and active learning. From the very beginning, community participation is not something that just happens, but, rather must be actively sought out, organized, facilitated, and

nurtured (Fischer, 2000). In reality, numerous obstacles confront school-community engagement—from both inside and outside a school system itself (Collins, 1999). Local community power structures, may, in fact, constrain such participation, and, "Given these realities, the notion of a school-community rural development program will not be well-received everywhere" (Collins, 1999, p. 22).

Time, leadership, the ability to focus energy, and the opportunity and willingness for ongoing dialogue are key influences on the success of establishing the educational policies described above (Jennings, 2000). In order to achieve this reform, therefore, it remains important to reach out to superintendents and principals, as they often hold important keys to power in rural communities (Collins, 1998, as cited in Collins, 1999). Similarly, as means to affect this reform, Engel (2000) suggests that experiential rural education advocates actively participate in local school board elections in order to bring attention to these policies.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

More than simply being concerned with the loss of rural schools, scholars and community members fear the disappearance of unique communities, cultures, and philosophies (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999, p. 75). In New York State, such sentiments were expressed by many Listening Session participants, who heralded rural culture and expressed concern with what appear to be dwindling rural populations and, specifically, a dearth of young people in their communities. Returning to the vision set forth by participants in the Rural Visioning Project, the education and engagement of young community members forms an implicit cornerstone of their ideas for a vibrant and sustainable rural New York. It is widely acknowledged that rural youth and their education play a critical role in turning this vision into reality.

At the same time that youth are recognized as key to community viability and the future of rural New York, however, Rural Visioning Project participants acknowledge a great disconnect between rural youth and their communities, adult community members and youth, and youth and policymakers. Given this, the current challenge presented by rural schools and youth appears to be three-pronged. In addition to the lack of youth engagement itself, there are associated issues of adult engagement with youth and policymaker engagement with both adult and youth community members.

Comments from both adult and youth participants in the Rural Visioning Project emphasize the importance of a youth-school-community linkage in overcoming this disjuncture. The primary theme emerging from

189

both the Rural Visioning Project Listening Sessions and the Youth Engagement activities can thus broadly be categorized as the integration of school/youth and community. Sentiments expressed by adults in the RVP Listening Sessions reflect a strong desire to utilize the perceived strengths and needs of rural communities, schools, and youth to combat the current alienation of youth and simultaneously enhance their learning. At the same time, sentiments expressed by youth reflect a desire for increased opportunities to bridge what they experience as a gap between school, community, and life in general.

With this in mind, our five educational policy recommendations are designed to positively influence both goals simultaneously.

1. Listen to what residents, of all ages, have to say about education and school reform and program design.
2. Encourage active and hands-on learning that allows students to make connections between the various subjects and real-world applications.
3. Allow for flexible curriculum that enables schools and communities to work together to make use of their strengths.
4. Increase focus on programs based upon the connection between economic development and education, linking school improvement and community economic development to the benefit of both.
5. Implement programs and curriculum that actively engage youth in the community planning and development process.

These recommendations can be interpreted as strategies for bridging the gap between youth, schools, and communities with the overall goal of reducing

alienation and enhancing learning by creating a sense of youth and community ownership in education.

A review of research suggests that the implementation of such differentiated educational strategies indeed complements/ enhances student achievement as measured by various institutionalized state and national standards, allowing us to conclude that it is, indeed, possible to simultaneously combat student disengagement and achieve state standards. In schools where such programs have been implemented, a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data demonstrate positive impacts on student motivation and achievement, and, in many cases, suggests community-level benefits as well.

Situated within this context, educational policies that encourage community-centered, experiential education and actively solicit and respond to youth and community-identified needs represent one way to successfully engage a greater percentage of students with the type of learning measured by state standards, while simultaneously fostering youth as the greatest resource in enhancing the viability of our rural communities. As Theobald and Natchigal (1995) summarize:

> Integrating schooling with the day-to-day life of the community, providing students with an opportunity to be part of society now rather than at some time in the distant future, and involving students in the struggle to solve complex issues that are important to their community [will] not only provide more powerful learning, but it [will] go far toward reducing the growing alienation among our young people. (p.12)

Returning to the fundamental problem posed by participants at the RVP Listening Sessions as youth alienation from school and community, such a connection does—by its very definition—act as a counter to

alienation while at the same time enhancing learning and commitment to community. In fact, central to reducing the alienation of youth from both school and community, the integration of school and community may actually serve to increase engagement with both and thus to foster rural youth and community development. And, for both youth and adults in rural communities throughout New York State, this differentiated educational paradigm offers hope that vision can indeed be transformed into reality.

Sample of Material Contained in Rural Visioning Project Listening Session Participant Packets

Listening Session Agenda/Breakdown of Activities

Rural Visioning Project
Listening Session #4
February 9, 1006
Tully, NY

12:30-1:00   Registration, Dessert, Networking

1:00- 1:35   Welcome and introductions
Rural Visioning Project overview
Table top exercise: identify the three issues most impacting rural NY

1:40- 2:40   Exploring Rural Development Programs and Resources

Theme areas:
1. Economic Development (includes Rural Entrepreneurship)
2. Agricultural & Food Systems Development
3. Environment, Land Use and Natural Resources
4. Rural Schools and Youth
5. Local and Regional Governance (and structures)
6. Poverty

In groups, you will cover two (maybe 3) theme areas to address:

Current Status (strengths and weaknesses)
Desired Future (in 10-20 years)
What is required to get from the current status to the desired future
- o In terms of policies, programs, new approaches
- o With consideration of the various levels of influence: Community, Region, and State
What is working/successes
Opportunities
Further research/analysis needed

2:45- 3:15   In small groups (you choose between the following themes):

Rural Health Care
Housing and Transportation
Energy (access to, cost of, alternative sources, etc)
Workforce Development
Community Capacity and Social Networks
Other

3:15- 3:45   Group discussion

Other issues and themes
Success Stories
Opportunities

3:45- 4:00   Wrap-up and Evaluation
State Conference
Next Steps

THANK YOU! Safe Trip Home

Three Most Important Issues Worksheet

Rural Visioning Project
Listening Session #4

Three most important issues impacting rural New York.

1. _____
_____
_____

Comments:
_____
_____
_____

2. _____
_____
_____

Comments:
_____
_____
_____

3. _____
_____

Comments:
_____
_____
_____

Theme Area Discussion Worksheet/Outline

Rural Visioning Project
Listening Session #4

Flip Chart Stations/ Small Group Discussions

Theme: _____

Current Status:

- Strengths

- Weaknesses

Desired Future (in 10-20 years):

What is required to get from the current status to the desired future:
       (in terms of policies, programs, new approaches, and considering various levels of
       influence: community, region, and state)

Successes:

Opportunities:

Further research needed:

Evaluation/Summary Worksheet

Rural Visioning Project
Listening Session #4

Summary Worksheet

1. What did you like best about the Listening Session?

2. What suggestions do you have for improving future sessions?

3. What did you not get a chance to say about the current situation, desired future, or
   opportunities for rural New York (either statewide or in this region)?

4. Other comments

APPENDIX B

Rural Visioning Youth Survey Instrument

Rural Visioning Project Youth Survey:
We're looking for young people interested in telling us about what's happening in their community. Won't you please take a few minutes to complete this survey so that we have a better idea of what youth consider important when it comes to community?

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You may skip any question you don't feel comfortable answering. If you decide to participate, you may stop at any time.

Since we do not ask you for any person, identifying information, each survey response is confidential and anonymous. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we do not have any information that will make it possible to identify you.

The researcher(s) conducting this study are Robin Blakely and Rod Howe. If you have questions, you may contact them at any time (Robin: 607-254-6795 or rmb18@cornell.edu; Rod: 607-255-9510 or rlh13@cornell.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the University Committee on Human Subjects (UCHS) at 607-255-5138, or access their website at
http://www.osp.cornell.edu/Compliance/UCHS/homepageUCHS.htm

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I consent to participate in the survey (please click the "I consent to participate in survey" button).
****
PERSONS WHO HAVE READ AND CONSENTED TO PARTICIPATE, AND HAVE CLICKED THE "CONSENT" BUTTON, WILL THEN BE DIRECTE TO THE FOLLOWING SURVEY:
****
Rural Visioning Project Youth Survey

1. What county do you live in?

Albany
Allegany
Broome
Cattaraugus
Cayuga

Chautauqua
Chemung
Chenango
Clinton
Columbia
Cortland
Delaware
Dutchess
Erie
Essex
Franklin
Fulton
Genesee
Greene
Hamilton
Herkimer
Jefferson
Lewis
Livingston
Madison
Monroe
Montgomery
Nassau
Niagara
Onieda
Onondaga
Ontario
Orange
Orleans
Oswego
Otsego
Putnam
Rensselaer
Rockland
St. Lawrence
Saratoga
Schenectady
Schoharie
Schuyler
Seneca
Steuben
Suffolk
Sullivan
Tioga
Tompkins
Ulster

Warren
Washington
Wayne
Westchester
Wyoming
Yates
New York City
Outside New York

2. Thinking about where you live, please rank the following topics in importance to you:

	Extremely	Very	Important	Not Very	Not At All
Ag./food systems development					
Education					
Employment					
Workforce development					
Environment and natural resources					
Local government					
Poverty					
Schools and youth					
Economic development					

3. Thinking about where you live, please rank how important these issues are to you:

	Extremely	Very	Important	Not Very	Not At All
Crime					
Energy					
Immigration					
Healthcare					
People leaving the state					

Rural entrepreneurship					
Threat of terrorism					
State budget					
State economy					
Taxes					

4. What's great about your community?
(Open ended)

5. What's not so great about your community?
(Open ended)

6. Tell us what you think you could do to make your community better
(Open ended)

7. If you left your community for five years and then returned, what would you hope to see upon your return?
(Open ended)

8. What would need to happen in order to make your desired change a reality?
(Open ended)

9. Give us an example of a successful program/s or project/s in your community that might benefit others
(Open ended)

10. Rather than wait for change to just happen, would you be interested in being part of a community action visioning process to make your voice heard in the future of your community?
Yes
No
Not Sure

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. You've just taken the first step in having your voice heard. We hope that we've started you thinking about the possibilities and that you will consider getting involved and active some day soon.

APPENDIX C

Comments from RVP Listening Sessions and Youth Engagement in Support of Policy Recommendation Two: *Encourage active and hands-on learning that allows students to make connections between the various subjects and real-world applications; take learning outside of the classroom.*

Note:

> *Adult participant comment*
> § *Youth participant comment*

> Too much pressure to "teach for the test" – leaves little time to expand and experience outside classroom-- Need research to show that experiential education in K-12 is advantageous –lead to its support as a curriculum requirement (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)
> Increase activities and experiences and service-learning outside of school (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006)
> Too many standards for testing – limits time, flexibility, ability to approach new subjects, ideas, and build skills (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)
> Regents rules do not serve students well, only increase stress – teaching for the test and too much funneling and standardizing – not teaching "how to learn" (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)
> With so many requirements, leaves little time for local flexibility (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006)
> Need formal standardization of field work - outside of classroom experiences (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)
> More local control over programming (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)
> Reduce the number of standardized tests, or eliminate current testing methods - give schools more flexibility in curriculum , integrate service learning into routine curriculum; Not just filling a requirement, but have active experiences throughout education (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)
> § Too concerned about Regents, SATs, and ACTs rather than focusing a little bit more on life skills
> § Need more trips and less notes
> § Innovative ideas in the classroom
> § One thing that bothers me is that a lot of kids are not getting the education they need. For example a lot of kids tend to skip school

and some people do not pay attention in class so they do not know what they need to know in order to get a job.

§ Offer classes such as agricultural education (which our school does not offer, yet surrounding schools do)

Comments from RVP Listening Sessions and Youth Engagement in Support of Policy Recommendation Three: *Allow for flexible curriculum that enables schools and communities to work together to make use of their strengths.*
Note:

> *Adult participant comment*
> § *Youth participant comment*

> Rural schools have strong community support—potential for more community use and investment (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)
> Need to increase engagement in community and individual activities at earlier age - schools need to instill a sense of ownership and stake in community at an earlier age – these enriched activities may decrease drug abuse and depression; Engagement in community – class projects, to provide an active experience consistent throughout primary and secondary education (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)
> Community raises a child" – we [rural areas] have advantage in this area; Opportunity for hands-on community experiences (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)
> Rural schools have strong community support; Schools provide a focus and identity for promoting community and economic development(Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)
> Alternative/community schools - some indicators that alt./community schools are superior for some students – maybe more advantageous than regent system (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)
> Need framework to build greater community- school collaboration (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)
> Need to teach youth more local history to instill a greater sense of pride (East Auora, NY, 3/2/2006)
> Schools as center of the community – fosters community unity from sports and other activities (even people without kids participate) (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)
> Schools are often center of the community; foster connectivity that impacts student success. Small schools are cornerstone of local communities (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Some youth get very engaged with community issues; Kids and families have greater sense of connection to place (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Educating students about their local community will increase integration, increase their investment and decrease migration (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Instill a sense of place and pride in "ruralness" and ag-related heritage – show value of historic relevance, physical assets (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Increased activities may increase local engagement (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

More community involvement in schools – explore youth development strategies – increase connection between county and school organizations (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

- § Need more student/community activities
- § More community service by all students.
- § Take education outside school
- § Being involved in community activities and being active in the community
- § More involvement of the community
- § There is a fair amount of school spirit--it brings the community together by watching the kids do sports or play in the band. It's a community spirit because they share something in common.
- § Better interaction in community

APPENDIX E

Comments from RVP Listening Sessions and Youth Engagement in Support of Policy Recommendation Four: *Increase focus on programs based upon the connection between economic development and education, linking school improvement and community economic development to the benefit of both.*
Note:

        Adult participant comment
§   *Youth participant comment*

Better match and communication between local education and local and regional workforce needs (Tully, NY, 2/ 9/ 2006)
Schools are working to address youth departure through economic development and education initiatives (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)
BOCES helps bring special expertise to help meet state standards (East Aurora, NY, 3/2/2006)
BOCES provides targeted education/training/skills that helps local labor force needs (Liberty, NY, 1/26/2006)
School to work program was successful (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)
Community investment in the hiring process (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)
If teaching and testing standards are too rigid, they can't adapt and shift to changing economy and workforce needs (Malone, NY, 3/17/2006
Regents education may help some kids graduate, but isn't tied to workforce development – the redesigned system is destructive. The system only teaches for the test (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)
Better connections between school and career starting at a younger age to gain more exposure - partnerships between schools and local businesses (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)
Keep youth in the area – want multi-generational towns – i.e. recruitment of returning kids to meet community workforce needs (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)
Greater retention of youth through creation of viable jobs with county, AND attract college educated youth back (Liberty, NY, 1/26/ 2006)

Develop training in local labor shortage areas to provide more incentives for youth to stay or return (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Adequate redefinition of workforce/college preparation, considering future labor needs and economic development (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Education should lead to local work connection with local business—local business investment in youth will improve their future workforce stability and retention (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Create more Local/regional "rootedness" in economic opportunities, strategies, vs. globalization and loss of local identity (East Aurora, NY, 3/2/2006)

Realize value of skilled high school grads that are not college bound (Ballston Spa, NY, 3/23/2006)

Inter-relationship of education, youth retention, workforce development – need good paying jobs based on resources we have (Voorheesville, NY, 2/23/2006)

Promote economic development locally to attract new youth and bring in new ideas – example - Canandaigua Center for Excellence - business sharing an interest in youth, mentoring, career exploration. Investment in youth will strengthen future workforce, improve stability and retention (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006)

Schools and economic development are intertwined--All issues interconnected; Provide a better local economic environment for youth to graduate into and stay locally (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

How to create, retain and build jobs (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Earlier career awareness for younger students—8th graders—visit BOCES center—career "job shadowing" and internships (Tully, NY, 2/9/2006)

Research in projecting needed future labor and help schools partner with preparing students (Watertown, NY, 3/16/2006)

Stigma attached to BOCES education (Geneva, NY, 1/20/2006); BOCES has an image problem (Van Etten, NY, 12/ 16/ 2005); Stigma of BOCES and CTE (Voorheesville, NY, 2/ 23/ 2006)

Need more emphasis on math, technology—[ease the] tension in rural areas between older agrarian way of life and new, high tech environment and economy (Van Etten, NY, 12/16/2005)

§ An increase of youth work to my area

207

- Jobs for teens and a way to get there
- Not enough job opportunities for youth under 18
- Better jobs, more interest in education, more interest in making the community better etc
- Take education outside school– internships
- Become more active in the revitalization of downtown

APPENDIX F

Comments from RVP Listening Sessions and Youth Engagement in Support of Policy Recommendation Five: *Implement programs and curriculum that actively seek youth input and engage youth in the community planning and development process.*
Note:

> *Adult participant comment*
> § *Youth participant comment*

> Youth services that are appropriate and targeted to current youth needs—traditional programming needs to be updated, youth need to be involved in designing their own programs (Liberty, NY, 1/26/2006)

§ Be a good citizen. Be active in organizations offered to me.
§ Taking action
§ Teamwork and a real effort
§ Change my attitude
§ People trying to make a change
§ Join a group for leadership, go to town meetings, petition
§ Make up a petition form for all the residents to sign agreeing to make a big change and difference in the community.
§ Make people aware of the problems
§ Need to put up a notice a couple of weeks in advance where we [youth] can see it!
§ Influence people to make a difference
§ Get more people involved in community projects.
§ Being involved in community activities and being active in the community
§ Make more community gatherings and cross-cultural events
§ Need people coming together
§ A safe place that youth can go to and not have to worry if they are okay and not doing something that they aren't suppose to be doing. It is too easy for them to get into trouble finding there own thing to do vs. having a place to go to and play some sports, and maybe some art activities and such.
§ Have more youth programs. Start working with groups of young people.

- § We could have a sports complex for stuff like swimming, soccer, basketball, and maybe other sports like that. Also some community service projects.
- § A community center would be great. That way high school students could teach elementary students their hobbies during the summer, almost like a camp.
- § Have a day to clean up places like the fairgrounds so…children could have a cleaner environment to play in. Maybe they could paint the fairgrounds to so it would be colorful.
- § Get the youth together and plan a day to clean up the town
- § We should start fixing up our old playground
- § Fund raisers to help other people in need
- § I think I could raise money so we could have more fun in our community like have a bake sale or something like that
- § Get people to raise money to build small parks or mini shops that are open on weekends
- § Get something started for people to donate books for a library
- § No ones willing to help make Savannah a better place. The youth won't go out and help keep the baseball fields looking nice. They leave it up to some else.

REFERENCES

Abrams, K.S. (1999). *Summary of Project Outcomes from EE and SSS Schools'
Final Report Data.* Florida Office of Environmental Education.
Retrieved January 29, 2010, from http://www.seer.org/pages/
research/Floridastudy1999.pdf

Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. (2009a). Opening
for the Director of Rural Education at the Alaska Department of
Education and Early Development. *Information Exchange*, *37*(23).
Retrieved January 12, 2010, from http://www.eed.state.ak.us/
doe_news/infoexch/ix090624.html

Alaska Department of Education and Early Development. (2009b). Phyllis
Carlson named Director of Rural Education. *Information Exchange*,
37(42). Retrieved January 12, 2010, from http://www.eed.state.ak.us/
doe_news/infoexch/ix091023.html

Bartosh, O. (2004). Environmental education: Improving student
achievement. Unpublished master's thesis, The Evergreen State
College, Olympia, Washington. Retrieved from
http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/PEEC_Research/0032637E-
007EA7AB.3/Bartosh%202004%20EE%20improving%20student%2
0achievement.pdf

Beeson, E., & Strange, M. (2000). *Why rural matters: The need for every state to
take action on rural education.* Washington, DC: Rural School and
Community Trust. Retrieved May 16, 2006, from http://www.rsct.
org/streport.html

Boss, J. A. (1999). *Outdoor Education and Development of Civic Responsibility.*
Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 425 051)

Brown, B.L. (2003). *CTE and work-based learning.* Columbus, OH: Ohio State
University. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 482 334)

California Department of Education. (2009). *Evaluation Criteria for EEI
Instruction Materials.* Retrieved December 17, 2009 from
http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/sc/ee/eeievalcriteria.asp

California Environmental Protection Agency. (2006). *Frequently Asked Questions.* Retrieved January 29, 2010, from http://www.calepa.ca.gov/Education/EEI/FAQs.htm# EEICurriculum

California Environmental Protection Agency. (2009). *Phases and timeline: Education and the Environment Initiative.* Retrieved December 19, 2009, from http://www.calepa.ca.gov/Education/EEI/Phases/ Default.htm

California Environmental Protection Agency. (2010a). *Education and the Environment Initiative home page.* Retrieved January 14, 2010, from http://www.calepa.ca.gov/ Education/EEI/default.htm

California Environmental Protection Agency. (2010b). *The Education and the Environment Initiative (EEI) curriculum.* Retrieved January 14, 2010, from http://www.calepa.ca.gov/Education/EEI/Curriculum/Default.htm

California Workforce Investment Board. (n.d.). *California Workforce Investment Board Official Home Page: Frequently asked question*s. Retrieved August 17, 2006, from www.calwia.org

Calkins, L.M. (1991). *Living between the lines.* Portsmouth, N.H: Heinemann Educational Books.

Catterall, J. (1986). *School dropouts: Policy prospects.* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 297 423)

Center for Rural Affairs. (2005, December). Youth are the key to community survival. *December 2005 CFRA Newsletter.* Retrieved July 13, 2006, from http://www.cfra.org/newsletter/2005_12.htm

Center for Rural Affairs. (2006, April). Young people most overlooked population in small town survival. *April 2006 CFRA Newsletter.* Retrieved July 13, 2006, from http://www.cfra.org/newsletter/ 2006_04.htm

Center for Rural Affairs. (2006, June). Working "with" Rural Youth Key to Fighting Child Poverty. *CFRA Newsletter.* Retrieved July 13. 2006, from http://www.cfra.org/newsletter/2006_06.htm

Chadd, J., & Anderson, M.A. (2005). Illinois Work-Based Learning Programs: Worksite Mentor Knowledge and Training. *Career and Technical Education Research, 30* (1). Retrieved November 24, 2007, from http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/CTER/ v30n1/chadd.html# urquiola

Collins, T. (1999). *Crucial policy links: Rural school reform, community development, and citizen empowerment.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED437263)

Community and Rural Development Institute. (2006). *New York State Rural Vision Project: Phase I Report.* Available online at http://devsoc.cals.cornell.edu/cals/devsoc/outreach/cardi/ program/indicators/rvp/upload/rvp-phase1report.pdf

Congressional Research Service. (2009). *H.R. 3180: SCORE (Strengthening Community Opportunities through Rural Education) Act of 2009.* Retrieved from http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h111-3180&tab=summary

Cooper, B.S., Fusarelli, L.D., & Randall, E. V. (2004). *Better policies, better schools: Theories and applications.* New York: Pearson Education, Inc.

Crockett, L.J., Shanahan, M.J., & Jackson-Newsom, J. (2000). Rural youth: Ecological and life course perspectives. *Adolescent Diversity in Ethnic, Economic, and Cultural Contexts, 10*, 43-74. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/ viewcontent.cgi?article= 1245&context=psychfacpub

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education*: *An introduction to the philosophy of education.* New York: The Free Press.

Dillon, S. (2010, March 17). Lawmakers say needs of rural schools are overlooked. *New York Times*. Retrieved March 21 2010, from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/18/ education/18educ.html

Duffin, M., & PEER Associates, Inc. (2007). *Why use place-based education?: Four answers that emerge from the findings of PEEC, the Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative,* [Power Point slides]. Retrieved December 17, 2009 from http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/PEEC_Reports/ S01248363-01248382

Dunlap, J. C. (2005). Problem-based learning and self-efficacy: how a capstone course prepares students for a profession. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 53*(1), 65-83. Retrieved December 10, 2009, from http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~jdunlap/ pblselfefficacy.pdf

Eberts, P. R. (2006). *Contemporary challenges to rural schools: A social scientist's perspective on school dropouts* [Power point slides]. Cornell University Rural School's Program. Presentation at Cayuga- Onondaga BOCES, 5/8/2006.

Eberts, P. R. (2007). *"Brain drain—really?" In fact, Upstate rural and suburban counties overall have a "brain gain."* Retrieved November 12, 2008, from http://devsoc.cals.cornell.edu/cals/devsoc/outreach/cardi/publicati ons/upload/11-2007-brain_drain-eberts.pdf

Eberts, P.R, & Dixon, E.E. (2006). Chapter Two: Population and Demography [draft, July 7, 2006]. Unpublished manuscript.

Eberts, P.R., & Merschrod, K. (2004). Population and Demographic Trends. In *Socioeconomic trends 2000 and well-being indicators in New York State 1950-2000 (3rd ed.)* (pp. 23-45). Albany: NYS Legislative Commission on Rural Resources.

Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture. (1995). Understanding Rural America. *Agriculture Information Bulletin No. 710.* Washington, DC. Retrieved March 15, 2006, from http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ ricpubs/understd.htm

Elmore, R. F. (1989). *How we teach is what we teach.* Washington, D.C:
American Association for Higher Education. Retrieved from ERIC
database. (ED 309694)

Engel, M. (2000). *The struggle for control of public education: market ideology vs.
democratic values.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Finn, J. D. (1993). *School engagement and students at risk.* Washington, DC:
National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Department of
Education. (NCES 93 470). Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/
pubs93/93470.pdf

Fischer, F. (2000). *Citizens, experts, and the environment: The politics of local
knowledge.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Flora, C.B., & Flora, J. L. (2003). Social Capital. In D. L. Brown and L. E.
Swanson (Eds.), *Challenges for Rural America in the Twenty-First Century
(*pp. 214-227). University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State
University Press.

Garasky, S. (2002). Where are they going? A comparison of urban and rural
youth's locational choices after leaving the parental home. *Social Science
Research*, *31*(3), 409-431.

Georgia REAL. (2007). *From the Beginning.* Retrieved December 17,
2009,from http://www.gareal.org/moreHistory.php

Gibbs, T. J., & Howley, A. (2000). *'World-class standards' and local pedagogies:
Can we do both?* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 448 014)

Grabinger, R.S., & Dunlap, J.C. (2002). (Abstract) Problem-based learning as
an example of active learning and student engagement. In T. Yakhno
(Ed.), *Lecture Notes in Computer Science, Vol. 2457 – Proceedings of the
Second International Conference on Advances in Information Systems* (pp. 375-
384). Retrieved January 15, 2010, from http://www.springerlink.com/
content/d6a7e0wlfv1u9391/

Grassroots. (2001). In *Princeton University WordNet 1.7.1.* Retrieved November
20, 2007, from http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/

Guajardo,F., Perez, D., Guajardo, M.A., Davila, E., Ozuna, J., Saenz, M., & Casaperalta, N. (2006). Youth voice and the Llano Grande Center. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 9*(4), 359-362. Retrieved January 20, 2010, from http://easydatacontrol.mpcstudios.com/ uploads/2372/2008/5/29/youthvoice.pdf

Hamilton, M. A., & Hamilton, S.F. (2006). Rural Schools & Youth- Faculty response. In Community and Rural Development Institute, *New York State Rural Vision Project: Phase I Report* (pp. 106-108). Available online at http://landgrant.cornell.edu/cu/cms/landgrant/rural/loader. cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=1220

Hamilton, S. F. (1980). Experiential learning programs for youth. *American Journal of Education*, *88*(2), 179-215. Retrieved from JSTOR database.

Hamilton, S.F., & Ivry, R.J. (2001). Forward. In Hughes, K. L., Bailey, T. R., & Mechur, M. J., *School-to-Work: Making a difference in education* (pp. 3-7). New York: Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 449 364)

Harbour, P.M. (2008). *What's changed? Are citizens reestablishing education ownership?* Retrieved January 1, 2010, from http://www.kettering.org/ readers_forum/readers_ forum/readers_forum_articles/Are_ Citizens_Reestablishing_ Education_Ownership

Hassebrook, C. (2003). *Strategies to Revitalize Rural America.* Center for Rural Affairs. Retrieved December 9, 2009, from http://www.cfra.org/ files/revitalization_ strategies_ 0.pdf

Health Resources and Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2002). *HHS Rural Task Force Report to the Secretary, July 2002.* Retrieved from http://permanent.access.gpo.gov/ lps21888/ PublicReport.htm

Herzog, M. J. R., & Pittman, R. B. (1995). *Home, family, and community: Ingredients in the rural education equation.* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 388 463)

Hirschman, C., Pharris-Ciurej, N., and Willhoft, J. (2006). *How many students really graduate from high school? The process of high school attrition.* Retrieved from https://depts.washington.edu/uwbhs/docs/HS_ Graduation.pdf

Howley, C. B., & Howley, A. (1995). The power of babble: Technology and rural education. *Phi Delta Kappan, 77*(2), 126-131.

Hughes, K. L., Bailey, T. R., & Mechur, M. J. (2001). *School-to-work: Making a difference in education. A research report to America* [Abstract]. New York: Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 449 364)

Hynes, M. (2003). Revitalizing economies around Cobscook Bay. In Rural School and Community Trust, *Engaged institutions: Impacting the lives of vulnerable youth through place-based learning* (pp. 9-22). Washington, DC: Rural School and Community Trust. Retrieved from http://www.ruraledu.org/user_uploads/file/Engaged_ Institutions.pdf

Israel, G.D., & Ilvento, T.W. (1996). Preface. In *Building a Foundation for Community Leadership: Involving Youth in Community Development Projects. (SRDC Series No. 199*). Mississippi State, MS: Southern Rural Development Center. Retrieved from http://srdc.msstate.edu/ publications/199/199.pdf

Jennings, N.E. (2000). Standards and Local Curriculum: A Zero Sum Game? *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 16*(3), 193-201. Retrieved April 4, 2006, from http://www.jrre.psu.edu/articles/v16,n3,p193-201,Jennings.pdf

Kannapel, P.J. (2000). Standards-based reform and rural school improvement: Finding the middle ground. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 16*(3), 202-208. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu/ articles/v16,n3,p202-208,Kannapel.pdf

Kannapel, P.J. and DeYoung, A.J. (1999). The Rural School Problem in 1999: A Review and critique of the literature. *Journal of Research in Rural*

Education, 15 (2), 67-79. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu/
articles/v15,n2,p67-79,Kannapel.pdf

Kiley, L.A. (2006). Rural Schools & Youth- Faculty response. In Community
and Rural Development Institute, *New York State Rural Vision Project:
Phase I Report* (pp. 113-114). Available online at http://landgrant.
cornell.edu/cu/cms/landgrant/rural/loader.cfm?csModule=security/
getfile&PageID=1220

King, J. (2003). Crossroads: Promising practices of change in the Mississippi
Delta. In *Engaged institutions: Impacting the lives of vulnerable youth through
place-based learning* (pp. 23- 37). Washington, DC: Rural School and
Community Trust. Retrieved from http://www.ruraledu.org/
user_uploads/file/Engaged_Institutions.pdf

Knapp, C.L. (1996). *Just beyond the classroom: Community adventures for
interdisciplinary learning.* Charleston, WV: Educational Research
Information Center/Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small
Schools. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 388 485)

LaRose, R., Whitten, P., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2008). *Connecting rural
youth and rural enterprise to the information economy.* East Lansing, MI:
Michigan State University Extension. Retrieved January 10, 2010,
from http://www.reeis.usda.gov/ web/crisprojectpages/214904.html

Larson, R., King L., McGee, M., & Shea, B. (1997, November). Making
entrepreneurship education work: The REAL Enterprises model. In
Connecting Learning & Work: The Rural Experience. Proceedings of the
School-to-Work in Rural Communities in the Northeast Technical
Assistance Conference, Saratoga Springs, NY. Retrieved from ERIC
database. (ED 420 472)

Lehr, C. A., Johnson, D. R., Bremer, C. D., Cosio, A., & Thompson, M.
(2004). *Essential tools: Increasing rates of school completion.* Retrieved from
http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/dropout/default.
asp

Lieberman, G. A. & Hoody, L. (1998). *Closing the achievement gap: Using the
environment as an integrating context for learning.* San Diego, CA: State

Education and Environment Roundtable. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 428 943)

Lindblom, C.E., & Cohen, D.K. (1979). *Usable knowledge: Social science and social problem solving.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Long, V., Bush, W.S., & Theobold, P. (2003). "*Place" value: The rural perspective.* Arlington, VA: National Science Foundation. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 478 060)

Loveland, E. (2003). Achieving academic goals through place-based learning: Students in five states show how to do it. *Rural Roots: News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust. 4*(1), 1, 6-9, 10-11. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 421 309)

Lyson, T.A. (2002). What does a school mean to a community? Assessing the social and economic benefits of schools to rural villages in New York. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 17*, 131-137. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu/articles/v17,n3,p131-137,Lyson.pdf

Miller, B.A. (1995). *The role of rural schools in community development: Policy issues and implications.* Retrieved from http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/v11,n3, p163-172,Miller.pdf

Mitra, D.L , & Gross, S.J. (2009). Increasing student voice in high school reform: Building partnerships, improving outcomes. *Educational Management Administration Leadership*, 37(4), 522-543. Abstract retrieved from ERIC database. (EJ 844 677)

Nachtigal, P.M. (Ed). (1982). *Rural education: In search of a better way.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc.

Nachtigal, P. (1997, May). Place value: Experiences from the Rural Challenge. In M.K. Baldwin (Ed.), *Coming Home: Developing a Sense of Place in Our Communities and Schools. Proceedings of the 1997 Forum in Jamestown, NY* (pp. 26-30). Jamestown, NY: Roger Tory Peterson Institute. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 421 309)

National Academy of Sciences. (1996). *National Science Education Standards.* Center for Science, Mathematics, and Engineering Education. Retrieved May 14, 2006, from http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php? record_id=4962&page=13

National Center for Education Statistics. (1993). *Dropout rates in the United States.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs94/94669.pdf

National Institute of Food and Agriculture. (2009). *4-H youth development: Studies that compare 4-H youth with non 4-H youth.* Retrieved from http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/family/sri/youthdev_sri_4h. html#compare4h

Nedwell, M. (2003). University-community partnerships: Addressing the community through alternative media. In *Engaged institutions: Impacting the lives of vulnerable youth through place-based learning* (pp. 67-78). Washington, DC: Rural School and Community Trust. Retrieved from http://www.ruraledu.org/user_uploads/ file/Engaged_Institutions.pdf

New York State Academy for Teaching and Learning. (n.d.a). Career Development and Occupational Studies. Retrieved May 14, 2006, from http://www.emsc.nysed. gov/nysatl/cdosstand.html

New York State Academy for Teaching and Learning. (n.d.b). Social Studies. Retrieved May 14, 2006, from http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nysatl/ ssstand.html

New York State Academy for Teaching and Learning. (n.d.c). Health, Physical Education, and Family and Consumer Sciences. Retrieved May 14, 2006, from http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/nysatl/healthstand. html

New York State Academy for Teaching and Learning. (n.d.d). New York State Learning Standards. Retrieved May 14, 2006, from http://www.emsc.nysed.govnysatl/ standards.html

New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. (1997, April). *New York's K-12 public education in the 21st century: A framework for action.*

Excerpts of the proceedings of the "Vision 21" Education Symposium, Saratoga Springs, NY. Albany, NY: Legislative Commission on Rural Resources.

New York State Legislative Commission on Rural Resources. (2006). Rural New York Visioning. *Rural Update.* Retrieved November 4, 2006, from http://assembly.state.ny.us/comm/Rural/20060828/

New York State 4-H Youth Development, Cornell Cooperative Extension. (2005). Students Design the Meet and Eat Corner Café After-School Program, Cattaraugus County. *4-H Annual Report 2005.* Retrieved August 21, 2007, from http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu/joinus/documents/05_4H_Annual_ Report_ final.pdf

New York State 4-H Youth Development, Cornell Cooperative Extension. (2007). *Youth CAN: The Youth Community Action Network.* Retrieved from http://nys4hcce.cornell.edu/program/YouthCAN.htm

New York State 4-H Youth Development, Cornell Cooperative Extension. (2008). *Lifecycle of Youth Community Action: An integral component of positive youth development.* Cornell Cooperative Extension. Retrieved from http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu/program/images/YCACircleHandout08 FINAL.jpg

Noddings, N. (1997). *Thinking about Standards.* Retrieved April 6, 2006, from http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/Resources/nel_noddings. htm

Parker, S. & and Colchado, J. (2003). Acequias: Nourishment for people, education, and the land. In *Engaged Institutions: Impacting the Lives of Vulnerable Youth Through Place-Based Learning* (pp 53-66). Washington, DC: Rural School and Community Trust. Retrieved from http://www.ruraledu.org/user_uploads/file/Engaged_Institutions. pdf

Partners for Children. (2001). *Promoting positive youth development in New York State: Moving from dialogue to action.* Retrieved December 15, 2009, from www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/youth/youthdev2.doc

Pendall, R. (2003). *Upstate New York's population plateau: The third-slowest growing "state."* Washington, D.C: The Brookings Institution. Retrieved from http://www.brookings.edu/es/urban/publications/200308_Pendall. pdf

Place-based Education Evaluation Collaborative. (2005). *Evaluation of NWF's Schoolyard Habitat program in Texas - Danforth, 2005.* Retrieved January 29, 2010, from http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/PEEC_Research/ S0083A79D-0083A7CA

Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative. (2008a). *The benefits of place-based education.* Retrieved January 29, 2010, from http://www.peec works.org/PEEC/Benefits_of_PBE-PEEC_2008_ web.pdf

Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative. (2008b). *Project CO-SEED evaluation reports --- ALL REPORTS, ALL YEARS.* Retrieved January 29, 2010, from http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/PEEC_Reports/ S0250E977-043C01AC

Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative. (n.d.). *Place-based education and student achievement.* Retrieved January 29, 2010, from http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/PEEC_Research/S0032637E-0361B9B8

Plank, S., DeLuca S., & Estacion, A. (2008). High school dropout and the role of Career and Technical Education: A survival analysis of surviving high school. *Sociology of Education, 81,* 345–370. Retrieved December 14, 2009, from http://www.soc.jhu.edu/people/ DeLuca/documents/SOE%202008.pdf

Poore, B. (1997, May). Summary Remarks. In M.K. Baldwin (Ed.), *Coming home: Developing a sense of place in our communities and schools. Proceedings of the 1997 Forum (*pp.40- 44). Jamestown, NY: Roger Tory Peterson Institute. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 421 309)

Prairie Rural Action. (2005*). Prairie Rural Action, November 14-15, 2005, Fargo, N.D: Interest Group Discussions.* Retrieved from http://www. agobservatory.org/library.cfm?RefID=80568

Program Evaluation and Educational Research Associates, Inc. (2006). *2005-2006 Beebe CO-SEED evaluation.* Retrieved January 29, 2010, from http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/PEEC_Reports/01469109007EA 7AB.3/ Eval%20Brief, %20Beebe %20test%20scores%202000-2005.pdf

Program Evaluation and Educational Research Associates, Inc. (2007a, May). *Strength in numbers: A learning conversation.* [Power Point slides]. Retrieved December 17, 2009, from http://www.peecworks.org/ peec/peec_secret/02122866-007EA7AB.5/Strength%20in%20 Numbers%20Boston%205-22-07%20v1b.pdf

Program Evaluation and Educational Research Associates, Inc. (2007b, June). Eval Brief: CO-SEED and Academic Achievement at Dennis C. Haley Elementary. *2002-2006 Haley CO-SEED Evaluation.* Retrieved from http://www.peecworks.org/PEEC/ PEEC_Reports/ 025142FA007EA7AB.1/Eval%20Brief,%20Haley%20acad%20achiev %20June%202007.pdf

Public Policy Institute. (2004). *Could New York let Upstate be Upstate?* Albany, NY: The Public Policy Institute of New York State, Inc. Retrieved May 13, 2006, from http://www.ppinys.org/reports/2004/ letupstate.pdf

Roberts, S. (2006, June 13). Flight of young adults is causing alarm Upstate. *New York Times.* Retrieved November 23, 2007, from http://www.nytimes.com/ 2006/06/13/ nyregion/13census.html

Rosenfeld, S. (1983). Something old, something new: The wedding of rural education and rural development. *Phi Delta Kappan, 65*(4), 270-273.

Rural Challenge. (1998). *An invitation to discuss standards in public schools: A preliminary policy statement of the Rural Challenge.* Granby, CO: Annenberg Rural Challenge News. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 420 454)

Rural Challenge (1999). *Public school standards: Discussing the case for community control.* Retrieved July 15, 2006, from http://files.ruraledu.org/docs/ standreport.html

Rural New York Initiative. (2006). *Rural Visioning Project.* Retrieved May 5, 2006, from www.rnyi.cornell.edu

Rural Vision Initiative. (2006). *A Vision for Rural New York: Rural Visioning Project Summary Report.* Retrieved November 15, 2008, from http://www.cals.cornell.edu/cals/ devsoc/outreach/cardi/programs/ indicators/rvp/upload/rvp-summary_ report.pdf

Schargel, F. P., & Smink, J. (2001). The Fifteen Most Effective Strategies for Dropout Prevention. In *Strategies to help solve our school dropout problem* (pp. 39-44). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Seal, K.R., & Harmon, H.L. (1995). *Realities of rural school reform.* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 384 454)

SEDL. (2010). *Rural students at risk in Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.* Retrieved January 25, 2010, from http://www.sedl.org/rural/atrisk/behaviors.html

Sipple, J.W. (2006). Rural Schools & Youth- Faculty response. In Community and Rural Development Institute, *New York State Rural Vision Project: Phase I Report* (pp. 109-112). Available online at http://landgrant.cornell.edu/cu/cms/landgrant/rural/loader.cfm?cs Module=security/getfile&PageID=1220

Smith, G. A. (2002). Place-based education. *Phi Delta Kappan, 83*(8), 584-595. Retrieved from http://legacy.lclark.edu/faculty/gasmith/objects/ placebased ed.pdf

Southern Rural Development Center. (1996). *Building a Foundation for Community Leadership: Involving Youth in Community Development Projects (SRDC Series No. 199).* Mississippi State, MS: Southern Rural Development Center. Retrieved from http://srdc.msstate.edu/ publications/199/199.pdf

Spitzer, E. (2007). *One New York: State of the State address.* Retrieved April 17, 2007, from http://www.stateline.org/live/details/speech?ContentId= 168384

Stasz, C. & Stern, D. (1998). Work-based learning for students in high schools and community colleges. *National Center for Research in Vocational Education CenterPoint, 1.* Retrieved December 31, 2006, from http://ncrve.berkeley.edu/CenterPoint/CP1/CP1.html

Swanson, C.B. (2004). *Graduation rates: Real kids, real numbers.* Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Education Policy Center. Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311114_grad_rates.pdf

Theobald, P. (1997). *Teaching the commons: Place, pride, and the renewal of community.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Theobald, P., & Nachtigal, P. (1995). *Culture, community, and the promise of rural education.* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 388 464)

U.S. Department of Education. (2009a, May 5). Education Secretary launches national discussion on education reform: "Listening and Learning Tour" seeks grassroots input on improving America's schools. Retrieved December 14, 2009, from http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/05/05052009.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2009b, May 18). Secretary Arne Duncan takes Listening Tour to Vermont, invites comments on rural education. *Ed. Gov. Blog.* Retrieved December 12, 2009, from http://www.ed.gov/blog/2009/05/secretary-arne-duncan-takes-listening-tour-to-vermont-invites-comments-on-rural-education/

U.S. Department of Education. (2009c, September 25). Secretary Arne Duncan takes Listening Tour to Wyoming. *Ed. Gov. Blog.* Retrieved December 12, 2009, from http://www.ed.gov/blog/2009/09/secretary-arne-duncan-takes-listening-tour-to-wyoming/

What Kids Can Do. (n.d). *Small towns, big dreams: In dying rural economies, youth efforts infuse new hope and money.* Retrieved from http://www.Whatkidscando.org/archives/smalltowns.html

Wilson, B.L., & Rossman, G. B. (1993). Mandating academic excellence: high school responses to state curriculum reform. *Sociology of Education*

Series. New York: Teachers College Press. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 373 384)

Wilson, S.M, Henry, C.S., & Peterson, G. W. (1997). Life satisfaction among low-income rural youth from Appalachia [Abstract]. *Journal of Adolescence, 20*(4), 453-459. Retrieved from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih. gov/pubmed/9268418

Wilson, S.M., & Peterson, G.W. (1988). Life satisfaction among adults from rural families. *Family Relations*, 37 (1), 84-91. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/584435

Woodhouse, J. L, & Knapp, C.E. (2000). *Place-based curriculum and instruction: Outdoor and environmental education approaches*. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 448 012)

Yager, R. (2003). Place-based education: What rural schools need to stimulate rural learning. *Rural Roots: News, Information, and Commentary from the Rural School and Community Trust, 4*(1), 9. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED 473 969)